Dave Porter on Cave Island

Edward Stratemeyer

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"EMPTY!" MURMURED DAVE SADLY. "EMPTY!"—*Page 217.*

Dave Porter Series

DAVE PORTER ON CAVE ISLAND

OR

A SCHOOLBOY'S MYSTERIOUS MISSION

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," "Dave Porter in the South Seas," "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport," "Old Glory Series," "Pan-American Series," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY H. RICHARD BOEHM

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

Published, March, 1912

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DAVE PORTER ON CAVE ISLAND

Norwood Press
BERWICK AND SMITH CO.
Norwood, Mass.
U. S. A.

PREFACE

"DAVE PORTER ON CAVE ISLAND" is a complete story in itself but forms the eighth volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

The opening tale of this series, called "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," related the adventures of a wide-awake lad at a typical boarding school of to-day. This was followed by "Dave Porter in the South Seas," whither our hero had gone to find his father, and then by "Dave Porter's Return to School."

From Oak Hall, Dave journeyed to Norway, as related in "Dave Porter in the Far North." On his return to this country he once more attended school, as told of in "Dave Porter and His Classmates." Dave made a host of friends and likewise a few enemies, and some of the latter plotted to do him much harm.

When vacation came once more, Dave received an invitation to visit a home in the far west, and what he did on that trip has been set forth in "Dave Porter at Star Ranch." Then, when vacation days were at an end, he came back to Oak

Hall, as related in the seventh volume of this series, entitled, "Dave Porter and His Rivals."

In the present book we find Dave again at school. But the Christmas holidays are at hand and the lad returns home. Here a most mysterious and unlooked-for happening occurs, and Dave's great benefactor, Mr. Wadsworth, is on the verge of ruin because of it. Dave gets a clew to the mystery, and, with his chums, resolves to investigate. He takes a long journey and has a number of stirring adventures, the particulars of which are given in the pages that follow.

When I started this line of books I trusted that Dave might please the boys, but I did not imagine that so many thousands of boys and girls all over the land would clamor as they have for more concerning the doings of my hero. I thank all for their appreciation of my efforts to please them, and I sincerely trust that the reading of this new volume will be a benefit to them.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

February 1, 1912.

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DAVE PORTER ON CAVE ISLAND

CHAPTER I

THE SCHOOLBOY CHUMS

"COME ON, fellows, if you are going! It's a good six-mile skate to Squirrel Island, and we've got to hustle if we want to get there in time for lunch."

"Wait till I fix my right skate, Dave," returned Phil Lawrence. "I don't want to lose it on the way."

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story," came from another of the group of schoolboys who were adjusting their skates. "Once a man asked for a pair of skates for——"

"Stow it, Shadow!" interrupted Dave Porter. "We haven't any time now to listen to stories. You can tell them while we are resting up at the island."

"Shadow can tell stories while we put away the lunch," observed Roger Morr, with a grin.

"Not much!" cried the lad mentioned. "I guess that skate will make me as hungry as anybody—and the stories will keep."

"I thought Ben Basswood was going, too?" came from another of the schoolboys.

"Here he comes, Lazy," answered Dave, and as he spoke he pointed to a path across the snow-covered campus, along which another boy was hurrying, skates in hand.

"Co-couldn't get here an-any so-sooner!" panted Ben, as he dropped on a bench to adjust his skates. "Old Haskers made me do some extra work in Latin! Wow, but don't I love that man!"

"We all do," answered Phil. "We are going to get up a testimonial to him. A silver-mounted——"

"Slice of punk, with an ancient lemon on top," finished Dave. "It's just what he's been waiting for." And at this sally there was a general laugh.

"Well, I'm ready," went on Phil, as he arose from the bench. "Say, but isn't it just a glorious day for the outing?" he added, casting his eyes around and drawing in a deep breath of the pure, cold air.

"It couldn't be better, Phil," answered Dave. "And we ought to have a fine time at the island, bringing down rabbits and squirrels. Old Jerry Lusk told me that hunting was never better."

"What's the matter with having some of the rabbits and squirrels for lunch?" asked Sam Day.

"Perhaps we can cook them, Sam," returned Dave. "But we had better depend on the lunch hamper for something to eat. By the way, we'll have to take turns carrying the hamper. It is rather heavy."

"Chip Macklin and I are going to carry it first," said a tall, strong youth named Gus Plum. "It's not so very heavy, although it is filled with good things."

"Don't lose it, on your life!" cried Phil.

"Lose it!" echoed Roger Morr. "Banish the thought! We'll form a guard around Gus and Chip, so they can't get away with it on the sly."

"Not so much as a doughnut must be eaten until we reach the island and start a campfire," said Dave. "Those are orders from headquarters," he added, with a grand flourish.

"Orders accepted, admiral!" cried Gus, and made a bow so profound that his skates went from under him, sending him to his knees. This caused a wild laugh, and the powerfully-built youth got up in a hurry, looking rather sheepish.

"I'm ready now," said Ben, as he left the bench and settled his skating cap on his head. "Come on, let's get away before old Haskers calls us back for something or other. He just loves to spoil a fellow's outing."

"There he is at one of the windows!" cried Roger, pointing back to the school building. "I really believe he is beckoning to us!"

"Don't look," cautioned Dave. "He'll want us to go back, to put away some books, or clean our desks, or something. Doctor Clay said we could take this outing, and I'm not going to let any teacher spoil it. Forward!" and away from the shore he skated, with his chums around him. They had scarcely covered a distance of a dozen yards when a window was thrown up hastily, and Job Haskers thrust his head through the opening.

"Boys! boys!" called out the Oak Hall teacher. "Wait a minute! I want to know where you are going, and if all of you have finished studying."

"Don't look back, and don't answer!" said Roger, in a hoarse whisper.

"Give the school yell!" suggested Phil.

"Just the thing!" returned Sam Day. "Now then, all together!" And an instant later through the clear, wintry air, rang the well-known Oak Hall slogan:

"Baseball!
Football!
Oak Hall
Has the call!
Biff! Boom! Bang! Whoop!"

Three times the boys gave the cry, and by that time they had skated far up the river and out of

sight of the window at which the teacher was standing. Job Haskers looked after them glumly, and then closed the window with a bang.

"They must have heard me—I don't see how they could help it," he muttered to himself. "Such disrespect! I'll make them toe the mark for it when they get back! Bah! Doctor Clay is altogether too easy with the boys. If I were running this school I'd make them mind!" And the teacher shut his teeth grimly. He was a man who thought that the boys ought to spend all their time in studying. The hours devoted to outdoor exercise he considered practically wasted. He was too short-sighted to realize that, in order to have a perfectly sound mind, one must likewise have a sound body.

"He'll have it in for us when we get back," murmured Chip Macklin. "My! how he does love to stop a fellow's fun!"

"Don't worry," chimed in Roger. "Sufficient unto the hour is the lecture thereof. Let us enjoy this outing while it lasts, and let come what will when we get back."

"Which puts me in mind of another story," broke in Shadow Hamilton. "A fellow used to eat too much, and he had to take his medicine regularly, to keep from getting indigestion. So once—wow!" And Shadow broke off short, for

Phil had suddenly put out his foot, sending the story-teller of Oak Hall sprawling.

"So he had to take his medicine," repeated Dave, gravely.

"Did the medicine agree with him?" asked Roger, innocently.

"He took it lying down, didn't he?" questioned Gus.

"I'll 'medicine' you!" roared Shadow, as he scrambled to his feet. Then he made a wild dash after the youth who had tripped him up, but Phil had skated on ahead and he took good care that Shadow did not catch him. "I won't tell you another story for a year!" the story-teller growled, after the chase was at an end.

"Phew! Shadow says he is going to reform!" murmured Ben.

"Let it pass, Shadow!" cried Dave, not wishing the story-teller to take the matter too seriously. "You can tell all the stories you please around the campfire. But just now let us push on as fast as we can. I want a chance to do some rabbit and squirrel hunting, and you know we've got to be back on time, or we'll have trouble with Doctor Clay as well as with old Haskers."

"Yes, and I want to take some pictures before it gets too dark," said Sam, who had his camera along.

"Do you know what Horsehair told me?"

came from Roger. "He said we were fixing for another snowstorm."

"It doesn't look so now," returned Dave. "But Horsehair generally hits it on the weather, so maybe we'll catch it before we get back."

"Wonder if we'll meet any of the Rockville cadets?" remarked Phil, as he and Dave forged to the front, they knowing the way up the river better than did some of the others.

"It is possible, Phil. All of them have guns, and I should think they would like to go hunting."

"I guess most of their firearms are rifles, not fowling-pieces."

"Not more than half—I learned that from Mallory, when we played hockey. He said they had some shotguns just for hunting and camping-out purposes."

"Well, those chaps have a holiday to-day, the same as we have, so some of them may be up around Squirrel Island. But I'd rather not meet them," and Dave's face became serious.

"Humph! If those military academy fellows try to play any tricks on us I reckon we can give 'em as good as they send," growled Phil.

"To be sure we can, Phil. But I'd rather keep out of trouble to-day and have some good, clean sport. I haven't been hunting this season and I'm just itching to draw a bead on a fat bunny, or

squirrel, or some partridges. You know, I used to go hunting in the woods around Crumville, when I was home."

"Why, of course! Didn't Roger and I go along once? But we didn't get much that trip, although we did get into a lively row with Nat Poole."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. I wish——" And then Dave Porter came to a sudden silence.

"What is it, Dave?" and Phil looked closely at his chum.

"Oh, not much," was the evasive answer.

"But I know something is worrying you," insisted the shipowner's son. "I've noticed it for several days, and Roger noticed it, too."

"Roger?"

"Yes. He came to me yesterday and said that he was sure you had something on your mind. Now, maybe it is none of our business, Dave. But if I and Roger can help you in any way, you know we'll be only too glad to do it." Phil spoke in a low but earnest voice.

"Hi, what's doing in the front rank?" cried a cheery voice at this juncture, and Roger Morr skated swiftly up beside Dave and Phil.

"I'm glad you came," said Phil, and he looked at the senator's son in a peculiar fashion. "I was just speaking to Dave about how we had

noticed something was wrong, and how we were willing to help him, if he needed us."

"Sure, we'll help you every time, Dave; you know that," returned Roger, quickly.

"I don't know that I need any help," answered Dave, slowly. "The fact of the matter is, I don't know what can be done."

"Then something *is* wrong?" cried both of his chums.

"Yes, if you must know. I was going to keep it to myself, for I didn't think it would do any good to tell about it. I'll tell you, but I don't want it to go any further, unless it becomes necessary to speak."

"Before you tell us, let me make a guess about this," said Phil. "Some of your old enemies are trying to make trouble for you, is that right?"

"Yes."

"And those enemies are Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff," cried Roger.

"Yes, again," answered Dave.

"What are they up to now, Dave?" The eager question came from Phil.

"They are up to a number of things," was the grave response of Dave Porter. "They are evidently going to do their best to disgrace my family and myself, and ruin us."

CHAPTER II

A GLIMPSE AT THE PAST

"DISGRACE you and ruin you!" cried Roger, in amazement.

"That is what it looks like," answered Dave. "I can account for their actions in no other way."

"Tell us just what is going on," urged Phil. "You know you can trust us to keep it a secret."

"I will tell you everything," answered Dave. "But first let us skate up a little faster, so that the others won't catch a word of what is said." And with that he struck out more rapidly than ever, and his two chums did likewise.

To those who have read the former volumes of this series, Dave Porter will need no introduction. For the benefit of others let me state that my hero had had a varied career, starting when he was but a child of a few years. At that time he had been found wandering along the railroad tracks near the town of Crumville. As nobody claimed him, he was placed in a local poorhouse and later bound out to a broken-down college professor, Caspar Potts, who had taken up farming for his health.

Professor Potts was in the grasp of a miserly money-lender of Crumville named Aaron Poole, who had a son Nat, who could not get along at all with Dave. Mr. Poole was about to foreclose a mortgage on the professor's place and sell him out when something occurred that was the means of changing the whole course of the professor's own life and that of the youth who lived with him.

On the outskirts of Crumville lived Mr. Oliver Wadsworth, a wealthy manufacturer, with his wife and daughter Jessie. One day the gasoline tank of an automobile took fire and little Jessie was in danger of being burned to death. Dave rushed to her assistance and beat out the flames, and thus saved her. For this Mr. Wadsworth was very grateful. He made some inquiries concerning Caspar Potts and Dave, and learning that Professor Potts had been one of his former college instructors, he made the old gentleman come and live with him.

"Dave shall go to boarding school and get a good education," said Mr. Wadsworth. And how Dave went has been told in detail in the first volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall." With Dave went Ben Basswood, his one boy friend in Crumville.

At Oak Hall, a fine seat of learning, located on the Leming River, in one of our eastern states, Dave made a number of warm friends, including

Phil Lawrence, the son of a rich shipowner; Roger Morr, whose father was a United States senator; Maurice Hamilton, usually called Shadow, who was noted for his sleep-walking and the stories he loved to tell; Sam Day, known throughout the school as Lazy, why nobody could tell, since Sam at times was unusually active, and a score of others, some of whom have already been introduced. He also made, in those days, one enemy, Gus Plum. But Gus had since reformed, and was now as good a friend as any of the rest.

What troubled Dave most of all in those days was the question of his identity. How he started to find out who he was has been related in my second volume, called "Dave Porter in the South Seas." There he did not meet his father, as he had hoped, but he did meet his uncle, Dunston Porter, and learned much concerning his father, David Breslow Porter, and also his sister Laura, then traveling in Europe.

When Dave came back to Oak Hall, as related in "Dave Porter's Return to School," he met many of his friends and succeeded in making himself more popular than ever. But some lads were jealous of our hero's success, and two of them, Nick Jasniff and Link Merwell, did what they could to get Dave into trouble, being aided in part by Nat Poole, the son of the miserly money-lender, who had followed Dave to the school. The plots

against Dave were exposed, and in sheer fright Nick Jasniff ran away and went to Europe.

Dave had been expecting right along to meet his father and his sister, and when they did not return to this country, and did not send word, he grew anxious, and started out to find them, as related in detail in "Dave Porter in the Far North." It was in Norway that Dave first saw his parent, a meeting as strange as it was affecting.

After his trip to the Land of the Midnight Sun, our hero returned once again to school, as related in "Dave Porter and His Classmates." Jasniff had not returned, but Link Merwell was still at hand, and likewise the lordly Nat Poole, and they did what they could to make our hero's life miserable. In the end Merwell did something that was particularly despicable and this caused Dave to take the law into his own hands and he gave the bully the thrashing that he well deserved. Merwell wanted to retaliate in some manner, but in the midst of his plotting, word of his wrong-doings reached the head of the school and he was ordered to pack up and leave, which he did in great rage.

While Dave was off hunting for his father and his sister, Laura Porter had been visiting her friend, Belle Endicott, at Mr. Endicott's ranch in the far west. Belle was anxious to meet her

girl chum's newly-found brother, and this led to a visit to the ranch, as told of in "Dave Porter at Star Ranch." Here Dave again met Link Merwell, and proved that the latter had been aiding some horse-thieves in their wicked work. Mr. Merwell had to settle a heavy bill because of his son's actions, and then, for a short space of time, Link disappeared.

With the coming of fall, Dave and his chums returned to Oak Hall, as related in the volume preceding this, called "Dave Porter and His Rivals." As his chief enemies had left the school, he did not anticipate much trouble, yet trouble came in a manner somewhat out of the ordinary. Nat Poole joined a group of students who had come to Oak Hall from another school, and the crowd did what it could to get Dave and his friends off the football eleven. Then, when Dave had once more fought his way to the front, came word that Nick Jasniff and Link Merwell were again "after his scalp," as Roger expressed it. Jasniff and Merwell were then attending a rival institution of learning known as Rockville Military Academy.

"Be careful, or they'll play you some dirty trick, Dave," said Phil, warningly.

"I've got my eyes open," replied Dave.

In a rather unusual manner Dave had become acquainted with a man named Hooker Montgomery, a fake doctor, who traveled around the

country selling medicines that he made himself. This man asked Dave to call on him, and when the youth did so he was suddenly seized from behind, made a prisoner, and carried off in a sleigh and then in an automobile. At first he did not know what to make of it, but at last learned that he was being held, for some purpose, by Merwell, Jasniff, Montgomery, and the fourth man, a mere tool. He watched his chance, and, at length, escaped, much to his enemies' chagrin.

"Have them all arrested," was the advice of Dave's chums, but this was not easy, since all of the evil-doers had disappeared. Then, one day, while on a sleigh-ride to a distant town, the boys fell in with Hooker Montgomery. The fake doctor was practically "down and out," as he himself expressed it, and said he would do anything for Dave, provided he was not prosecuted.

"It was all a plot gotten up by those two, Jasniff and Merwell," said Hooker Montgomery. "They promised me some money if I would help them, but I never got a cent." Then he said that Jasniff and Merwell were in town.

"We'll locate them," said Dave, but this was not accomplished until later, when the pair of rascals were encountered at a railroad office. Our hero and his chums tried to stop Jasniff and Merwell, but the rascals rushed through a crowd and got aboard a train; and that was the last seen of

them for the time being. The boys might have gone after the pair, but they had an important hockey game to play, and when they administered a stinging defeat to Oak Hall's ancient rival, Rockville Academy, Dave, for the time being, forgot that he had an enemy in the world.

"Two weeks more of the grind, boys!" cried Dave, on the following Monday. "And then home for the holidays."

"Right you are," answered Phil. "But, oh, those two weeks!"

On Wednesday one of Dave's chums celebrated his birthday, and among the presents received was a very fine double-barreled shotgun. This lad immediately wanted to go hunting; and the result was that the boys applied to Doctor Clay for permission to go to Squirrel Island, up the river, on a hunting expedition, the following Saturday. There was just sufficient snow on the ground to make rabbit and squirrel tracking good, and the boys were told that they might remain away all day. Six of them had guns and two had revolvers, and they carried in addition a good-sized hamper of provisions for lunch.

"Now, boys, be careful and don't shoot yourselves or anybody else," said Doctor Clay, with a smile, when Dave, Roger, and Phil left the school building. "Don't fire at anything until you are certain of what it is. Every hunting season some-

body is killed through the sheer carelessness of somebody else."

"We'll be careful," answered Dave.

"Do you think you'll get any game?" And the doctor continued to smile.

"I hope to bring you at least a brace of rabbits or squirrels, Doctor."

"Well, I wish you luck. And don't stay too late," returned the head of the school, and then with a pleasant nod he dismissed them.

Dave, Roger, and Phil were the first at the place of meeting, but they were quickly joined by all the others except Ben.

"I'll tell you what, Phil," said the senator's son, when he had a chance to talk to Phil alone. "Something is wrong with Dave. He isn't himself at all. Can't you see it?"

"Of course I can, Roger," was the reply of the shipowner's son. "If I get a chance to speak to him about it, I am going to do so. But I've got to be careful—I don't want to hurt his feelings."

"When you do speak, give me the sign, so I can hear what he has to say, too," went on Roger, and to this Phil agreed. Then came the start up the river, and a little later Phil broached the subject, and Dave made the dismaying announcement that Jasniff and Merwell were doing their best to bring disgrace to himself and his family and ruin them.

CHAPTER III

WHAT DAVE HAD TO TELL

"It's rather a long story, and I scarcely know how to begin," said Dave, after he, Phil, and Roger had skated ahead and to the right, where the others were not likely to overhear the conversation. "But, to begin with, Jasniff and Merwell have been to Crumville since they left here in such a hurry, and—I have some reason to believe—they have been here in town, too."

"Here!" cried the shipowner's son.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell us of this before?" asked Roger.

"I didn't know of it until lately, and I didn't want to worry you over my private affairs."

"But what have they done?" demanded Phil, impatiently.

"As I said before, Phil, I hardly know how to begin to tell you. But to plunge right in. In the first place, when they were in Crumville they followed my sister Laura and Jessie Wadsworth to a concert by a college glee club. They forced their attentions on the two girls, and gave out-

siders an impression that they had come as escorts. The girls were so upset over it that Laura wrote me that Jessie was actually sick. Two days after that, when the girls were out walking one evening, Jasniff and Merwell followed them, and right on the main street, near the post-office, they came up and commenced to talk and Merwell said to Laura, loud enough for half a dozen folks to hear: 'You've got to keep your word—you can't go back on us like that.' And Jasniff added: 'Yes, you girls were glad enough to let us give you a good time before, down at the Rainbow.' The Rainbow is a ten-cent moving-picture place, and a low one at that. Of course there wasn't a word of truth in it, but Merwell and Jasniff gave folks the impression that Laura and Jessie had been going out with them, and you know how such reports spread in a small town like Crumville."

"The hounds!" exclaimed the senator's son, wrathfully. "They should have been run out of town!"

"Why didn't the girls tell your folks?" asked Phil.

"They did, as soon as they got home, and my father, Uncle Dunston, and Mr. Wadsworth went out to look for Merwell and Jasniff, but they were not to be found. But that was only the beginning. The next day an old lady came to the house with a letter she had picked up in the post-office. It

was addressed to Link Merwell and had my sister's name signed to it, and stated that she was sorry they had quarreled and wouldn't he please forgive her and take her to the dance as promised? Of course the whole thing was a forgery, and it was dropped in the post-office just to make talk. I suppose Merwell thought some chatterbox would pick it up and spread the news."

"But what is his game?" queried the ship-owner's son. "I don't see how he is going to gain anything by such actions."

"He wants to ruin our reputations, just as he and Jasniff have ruined their own. But I haven't told you all yet. A day later my father heard of another letter being found, in which Laura and Jessie promised to go off on a joy-ride in an auto with Merwell and Jasniff. Then Merwell and Jasniff appeared in Crumville with a stunning touring car, and they had two girls with them, loudly dressed and heavily veiled, and the whole four tooted horns, and sang, and behaved in anything but a becoming fashion. A good many folks thought the veiled girls must be Laura and Jessie, and you can imagine how my sister and her friend felt when they heard of it."

"Those chaps ought to be arrested," murmured Phil.

"And tarred and feathered," added the senator's son.

"After that, my father and Mr. Wadsworth got after them so sharply that they left Crumville. That was only a few days ago. The very next day came a lot of goods to the house, delivered by a large city department store. The folks hadn't ordered the goods and didn't know what to make of it. They investigated, and learned that a young woman calling herself Laura Porter had selected the things and had them sent out. Then came other goods for Mr. Wadsworth, said to have been bought by Jessie. It was an awful mix-up, and it hasn't been straightened out yet."

"It's the limit!" muttered the senator's son. "I'll wager your dad and Mr. Wadsworth would like to wring those chaps' necks!"

"Wait, you haven't heard it all yet," went on Dave, with a sickly smile. "Yesterday I received a notice from the express company here to call for a package on which eighteen dollars was due. I was expecting some things that I am going to take home for Christmas presents, although they were to come to fifteen dollars and a half. I paid for the package, thinking I had made a mistake in footing up my purchases, and when I got it home I found out it wasn't what I had bought at all, but a lot of junk nobody can use. Then my own package came in by the next express, and, of course, I had to pay again. I sent a telegram to the city about the first package and they an-

swered that David Porter had purchased the same and had it sent C. O. D. Then two other packages came, one calling for six dollars and the other for twenty-four dollars. But I refused to have anything to do with them, and said I could easily prove that I hadn't been to the city to order them. But it is going to cause a lot of trouble."

"I believe you," returned the senator's son.

"Anything more, Dave?" queried Phil.

"Yes. Last night, if you will remember, an old man came to see me. He said that two young men had sent him to me, saying that we wanted a man in Crumville to take care of a certain young lady who was slightly out of her mind. He said he had once worked in an asylum and knew he could give satisfaction, even if he was getting old. It was another of Merwell and Jasniff's mean tricks, and I had quite a time explaining to the old man and getting him to go away. He said he had spent two dollars and a quarter in car-fare to come to see me, and I felt so sorry for him that I gave him five dollars to help him along."

"Dave, where is this going to end?" cried Roger.

"That is just what I want to know," returned Dave. "Perhaps by the time we get back to Oak Hall there will be more packages waiting

for me—or potatoes, or a horse, or something like that."

"You could have Merwell and Jasniff arrested for this," was Phil's comment.

"Yes, if I could catch them. But they know enough to keep shady. But that isn't all. Yesterday I got a letter, or rather a note. It was postmarked from Rocky Run, about fifteen miles from here. Inside of the envelope was a card on which was written: 'We'll never let up until we have ruined you.'"

"Was it signed?" asked the senator's son.

"Oh, no. But I am sure it came from Merwell and Jasniff."

"They are certainly sore," was Phil's comment.

"Traveling around must cost them money. Where do they get the cash?" asked Roger.

"From Mr. Merwell most likely," answered Dave. "He got a good price when he sold his ranch, and he seldom denies Link anything."

"Have you any idea who the girls were who were in the auto in Crumville?"

"Not exactly, but I think they must have been some of the girls Nat Poole goes with. When Jasniff and Merwell were there with Nat, I saw the whole crowd out with some girls from the cotton mills. They were nice enough girls in their way, but they were very boisterous and not the

kind Laura and Jessie care to pick for company. I suppose those girls played their part thinking it was nothing but a good joke. One had a hat on with feathers such as Jessie wears and the other wore a coat and veil like Laura's. I guess a good many who saw them riding in the auto and cutting up like wild Indians thought they were Laura and Jessie." And Dave heaved a deep sigh.

"And what are you going to do, Dave?" asked Phil, after a short silence, during which the three chums continued to skate in advance of their friends.

"What can I do? We are trying to locate the rascals, and when we do we'll make them stop. But in the meantime——"

"They may cause you no end of trouble," finished the senator's son.

"I don't care so much for myself as I do for Laura and Jessie, and for Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth. I hate to see them suffer because of my trouble with those rascals. I don't see why Merwell and Jasniff can't fight it out with me alone."

"You forget one thing, Dave," returned Phil. "Merwell was once sweet on your sister. I suppose it made him furious to be turned down by her."

"Well, then, why does he annoy Jessie? She never harmed him, or Jasniff either."

"Huh! As if you didn't know why!" replied Roger, with something like a chuckle. "Don't they both know that Jessie is the very apple of your eye, and that anything that brings trouble to her will cut you to the heart? Of course they know that, Dave, and you can rest assured that they will try to hurt you quite as much through Jessie as they'll try to hurt you direct."

"Perhaps, Roger. If I was sure——"

"Low bridge!" shouted Phil at that instant, as a bend of the river was gained, and then the whole crowd of students swept under the low-hanging branches of a number of trees. Those ahead had to go slowly and pick the way with care.

"How much farther have we to go?" called out Sam Day.

"Only a couple of miles," replied Dave. He turned to Phil and Roger. "That's about all," he whispered. "Keep it to yourselves."

"We will," they replied.

"Somebody else going to carry this hamper?" cried Chip Macklin. "It's getting rather heavy."

"I'll carry one end," said Ben Basswood.

"And I'll take the other," added Phil. "Dave, you and Roger go ahead and bring down a couple of deer, and a bear, and one or two tigers, or something like that," he continued, with a grin,

for he wanted to get Dave's mind off of his troubles.

"Nothing but an elephant for mine," answered Dave, with a forced laugh. "I don't want to waste my powder."

"As the society belle said when she left the mark of her cheek on the gent's shoulder," remarked Buster Beggs, the fat lad of the group.

"Say, that puts me in mind of another story," came from Shadow. "Once on a time a Dutchman heard that a certain lady was a society belle. He wanted to tell his friend about it, but he couldn't think of the right word. 'Ach, she is von great lady,' he said. 'She is a society ding-dong!'"

"Wow!"

"There's a ringer for Shadow!"

"Shadow, you want to frame that joke and hang it in the woodshed."

"Put it down in moth-balls until next summer, Shadow."

"Oh, say, speaking about moth-balls puts me in mind of another story. A man——"

"Was it a young man, Shadow?" asked Dave, calmly.

"Maybe it was a very old man," suggested Phil.

"Was he clean-shaven or did he have a beard?" queried Roger.

"Never mind if he was young or old, or clean-shaven or not," cried the story-teller. "This man——"

"Was he an American or a foreigner?" demanded Gus Plum. "That is something we have simply got to know."

"And if he was knock-kneed," put in Sam. "I hate love stories about knock-kneed men. They aren't a bit romantic."

"Who said anything about a love story about a knock-kneed man?" burst out Shadow. "I said——"

But what Shadow was going to say was drowned out in the sudden report of a shotgun,—a report so close at hand that it made nearly every student present stop in alarm.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHOOLBOY HUNTERS

"DAVE, what did you shoot at?"

It was Phil who asked the question, for he had been the only one to see Dave raise his shotgun, take quick aim, and fire into the brushwood lining the river at that point.

"I shot at a rabbit, and I think I hit him," was the reply. "I'll soon know." And Dave skated toward the shore, less than twenty yards away. He poked into the bushes with the barrel of his gun and soon brought forth a fat, white rabbit which he held up with satisfaction.

"Hurrah!" cried the senator's son. "First prize goes to Dave! He's a fine one, too," he added, as the students gathered around to inspect the game.

"Thought you said you wouldn't shoot anything less than an elephant," grunted Buster.

"The elephant will come later," answered Dave, with a smile.

"I'd like to get a couple like that," said Gus Plum, wistfully.

"Maybe that will be the total for the day,"

"First prize goes to Dave! He's a fine one, too."—*Page 28.*

was Sam's comment. He had gone wild-turkey shooting once and gotten a shot at the start and then nothing more, so he was inclined to be skeptical.

"Oh, we'll get more, if we are careful and keep our eyes open," declared Dave. "I saw the track of the rabbit in the snow yonder and that made me look for him."

Dave's success put all the students on the alert, and they spread out on either side of the stream, eager to sight more game.

Less than two minutes later came the crack of Gus Plum's shotgun, followed almost immediately by a shot from Buster Beggs' pistol. Then a gray rabbit went scampering across the river in front of the boys and several fired simultaneously.

"I got him! I got him!" shouted Gus, and ran to the shore, to bring out a medium-sized rabbit.

"And we've got another!" cried Sam. "But I don't know whether Shadow, Ben, or I killed him."

"I guess we all had a hand in it," said Ben. "We all fired at about the same time."

"What did you get, Buster?" questioned Chip Macklin.

"I—I guess I didn't get anything," faltered the fat youth. "I thought I saw a squirrel, but

I see now that it is only a tree root sticking out of the snow."

"Great Scott, Buster! Don't shoot down the trees!" cried Phil, in mock dismay. "They might fall on us, you know!" And a laugh arose at the would-be hunter's expense.

On the students skated, and before long reached a point where the river was parted by a long, narrow strip of land known as Squirrel Island, because squirrels were supposed to abound there.

As they reached the lower end of the island Dave held up his hand as a warning.

"I think I saw some partridges ahead," he said, in a low voice. "If they are there we don't want to disturb them. Put down the hamper and take off your skates, and we'll try to bag them."

His chums were not slow in complying with his commands, and soon the crowd was making its way toward the center of the island, where grew a dense clump of cedars. They had to work their way through the brushwood.

"Ouch!" exclaimed Shadow, presently.

"What's the trouble?" whispered Roger.

"Scratched my hand on a bramble bush," was the reply. "But it isn't much."

"Be careful of your guns," cautioned Dave. "Don't let a trigger get caught in a bush or you may have an accident."

"There they are!" cried Ben, in a strained voice. "My, what a lot of 'em!"

He pointed ahead, and to one side of the tall cedars they saw a covey of partridges, at least twenty in number, resting on the ground.

"All together!" said Dave, in a low, steady voice. "Fire as you stand, those on the right to the right, those on the left to the left, and those in the center for the middle of the flock. I'll count. Ready? One, two, three!"

Crack! bang! crack! bang! went the shotguns and pistols. Then came a rushing, rattling, roaring sound, and up into the air went what was left of the covey, one partridge, being badly wounded, flying in a circle and then directly for Roger's head. He struck it with his gun barrel and then caught it in his hands, quickly putting it out of its misery. The other boys continued to bang away, but soon the escaping game was beyond their reach.

"A pretty good haul!" cried Dave, as he and his chums moved forward. "Three here and the one Roger has makes four. Boys, we won't go back empty-handed."

"Who hit and who missed?" questioned Sam.

"That would be a hard question to answer," returned Phil. "Better let the credit go to the whole crowd," and so it was decided.

"Well, there isn't much use in looking for

any more game around here," said Dave. "Those volleys of shots will make them lay low for some time."

"Let's go into camp and get lunch," suggested Buster. "I'm as hungry as a bear."

"Were you ever anything else?" questioned Ben, with a grin, for the stout youth's constant desire to eat was well known.

They tramped to the south shore of the island, and there, in a nook that was sheltered from the north wind, they went into temporary camp, cutting down some brushwood and heavier fuel and building a fire. Over the flames they arranged a stick, from which they hung a kettle filled with water obtained by chopping a hole through the ice of the river.

"Now, when the water boils, we can have some coffee," said Roger, who was getting out the tin cups. "And we can roast those potatoes while the water boils," he added.

"What about some rabbit pot-pie, or roast partridge?" asked Buster.

"Oh, let us take all the game back to the school!" exclaimed Ben. "Just to show the fellows what we got, you know."

"That's the talk!" cried Gus. "If we don't, maybe they won't believe we were so lucky."

"Yes, let us take it all back," chimed in Chip Macklin.

All but Buster were willing to keep the game. He heaved a deep sigh.

"All right, if we must," he said mournfully. "But it makes my mouth water, just the same!" And he eyed the plump rabbits and fat partridges wistfully.

Inside of half an hour the lunch was under way. Around the roaring campfire sat the students, some on convenient rocks and others on a fallen tree that chanced to be handy. They had brought with them several kinds of sandwiches, besides hard-boiled eggs, crackers, cheese, some cake, and the coffee, with a small bottle of cream and some sugar. They also had some potatoes for roasting, and though these got partly burned, all declared them "fine" or "elegant,"—which shows what outdoor air will do for one's appetite.

They took their time, and during the meal Shadow was allowed to tell as many stories as he pleased, much to his satisfaction. It was Dave who was the first to get up.

"Might as well be moving," he said, after consulting his watch. "We'll have to start on the return inside of two hours, and that won't give us much time for hunting."

"Wait, I want just one more picture!" cried Sam, who had been busy before with his camera. "Now all look as happy as if to-morrow were

Christmas!" And as the others grinned over the joke, click! went the shutter of the box, and the picture was snapped.

"Now, Sam, let me take you, with a gun in one hand and the partridges in the other!" cried Dave. "If it turns out well, we can have it enlarged for our dormitory." And a minute later another picture was added to the roll of films.

"Why not leave the things here and come back for them?" suggested Roger. "No use in toting the hamper and game everywhere."

"We can hang the game in a tree," added Ben.

All agreed to this, and so the hamper and the game were hung up on the limbs of a near-by walnut tree along with their skates and some other things. Then the fire was kicked out, so that it might not start a conflagration in the woods, and the students prepared to continue their hunt.

"I guess we may as well tramp to the upper end of the island first," said Dave, in answer to a question from his companions. "Then, if we have time, we can beat up one shore and then the other. By that time it will be getting dark and time to turn back to the Hall."

"Say, wait a minute!" cried Ben, suddenly.

"What's wrong, Ben?" asked several.

"Why, I—er—I thought I saw somebody over in the woods yonder, looking at us," and the Crumville lad pointed to the trees in question.

All gazed steadily in the direction but saw nothing unusual.

"Maybe it was a rabbit, or a bear, or something like that," suggested Buster. "If it's a bear we had better look out," he added, nervously.

"We'll soon find out," said Dave. "Come on," and he walked forward toward the woods. But he found nothing and soon rejoined his companions.

"I must have been mistaken," said Ben. "Come on, if we are to do any hunting." And off he stalked, and one by one the others followed.

Evidently the shots at the partridges had scared much of the game away, for at the upper end of the island they started up nothing but two squirrels and a few wild pigeons. Then they came down the north shore and there bagged two rabbits. They also saw a wild turkey, but it got away before anybody could take aim at it.

"See, it has started to snow!" cried the senator's son, presently, and he was right. At first the flakes were few, but inside of five minutes it was snowing steadily.

"We may as well start for the Hall," said Dave. "This storm looks as if it might last for some time."

They left the shore and soon reached the edge of the island. By this time the snowflakes were

coming down so thickly that the boys could see but little around them. The sky was now growing quite dark.

"I don't like this," was Phil's comment. "We'll have no fun of it getting back to school, especially if the snow gets so deep that we can't skate on the ice."

"Say, this puts me in mind of a story," commenced Shadow. "Once two boys were caught in a storm and——"

"We haven't any time for yarns now, Shadow!" cried Dave. "It's back to the camping place as fast as we can get there, and then off for school, unless we want to be snowed in along the route!"

All started across the island, which, at that point, was not over seventy-five yards wide. They came out at a spot just above where they had stopped for lunch. Soon all of them stood close to where lay the remains of the campfire, now covered with the fast-falling snow.

"Hello! What does this mean?"

"Where is the hamper?"

"Where is the game?"

"What has become of the skates?"

"Where is that overcoat I left on the tree?"

These and several other questions were asked in rapid succession. Then the Oak Hall students looked at each other in blank dismay.

And not without good reason. For everything left at the camping spot when they had continued the hunt—game, hamper, skates, an overcoat, a sweater, and some other things of lesser importance—all had disappeared!

CHAPTER V

A TRAMP THROUGH THE SNOW

"WHAT do you make of this, Dave?"

"I don't know what to make of it, Roger—excepting that somebody has taken our things."

"Do you think it's a joke, or just plain stealing?" demanded Ben.

"That remains to be found out," replied Ben. "One thing is certain, the things didn't walk off by themselves."

"Footprints of two persons!" exclaimed Gus, who had been scanning the snow-covered ground in the vicinity of the trees and bushes.

"Where do they lead to?" asked Dave, eagerly.

"Here they are—you can follow them as easily as I can," was the reply, and the heavy-set youth pointed out the tracks in the snow. They led all around the trees and bushes and then in the direction of the river. Here there were a jumble of tracks and further on the marks of skate runners.

"Stopped to put on their skates," remarked the senator's son.

"And they have skated off with all our things!"

grumbled Buster Beggs. "What are we going to do?"

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story," came quickly from Shadow. "Once two boys were out skating and———"

"For the sake of the mummies of Egypt, let up on the story-telling, Shadow!" burst out Phil. "Don't you realize what this loss means to us? It's bad enough to lose the hamper and clothing, but what are we to do in this snowstorm, with night coming on, and so far from Oak Hall without skates?"

"Humph! I guess we'll have to walk," grumbled the story-teller of the school. "But that will take time, and if this storm keeps up——"

"We'll be snowed under!" finished Chip Macklin.

"Well, no use in staying here," came from two of the students.

"That is just what I say," said Dave. "Those skate marks lead down the river and that is the way we want to go. By following them we'll be getting nearer to the Hall and at the same time closer to the fellows who took our things."

"We'll never catch those fellows," grumbled Ben. "They can skate five times as fast as we can walk."

"Never mind, we'll go after 'em anyway," replied Gus. "And if we catch 'em——" He did

not finish in words but brought his right fist down hard into his left palm, which left no doubt as to how he intended to treat the thieves.

"Maybe it's a trick of some of the Rockville cadets," suggested Buster, when the crowd were on their way down the river.

"Say, don't you remember my saying I thought I saw somebody near the camp, just before we went away?" burst out Ben. "You all thought I was mistaken."

"Well, I reckon you were not mistaken," answered Dave. "It's a great pity we didn't investigate more before leaving."

"No use in crying over spilt milk," said Sam.

"Which puts me in mind of a sto——" commenced Shadow, and then suddenly stopped talking and commenced to whistle to himself.

"Say, boys, if anybody should ask you, you can tell him it is snowing some," puffed Buster, who was struggling to keep up with those in front. "If it wasn't that we were on the river, it would be easy to lose our way."

"That's true," replied Dave. "The snow seems to be coming down heavier every minute."

"Yes, and the wind is coming up," added Roger. "We'll have a hard time of it reaching the Hall. We'll never do it by supper-time."

"Then where are we going to get something

to eat?" demanded Buster. "I'm not going without my supper just because I can't get back."

"Perhaps we can get something at some farmhouse," suggested Phil.

"I've got an idea!" cried Dave. "Why can't we get some farmer to hook up a carriage or a sleigh and take us to the Hall that way?"

"Hurrah, just the cheese!" cried Ben, who did not relish walking such a distance. "The thing is, though, to find the farmer," he continued soberly.

"Keep your eyes open for lights," suggested Dave, and this was done.

A quarter of a mile more was covered, the students hugging the north shore of the stream, as that afforded the most shelter from the rising wind. Then Roger gave a cry.

"I think I saw a light through the snow! Just look that way, fellows, and see if I am right."

All gazed in the direction indicated, and presently three of the boys made out a glimmer, as if it came from a lantern being swung to and fro. Then the light disappeared.

"Perhaps it's some farmer going out to care for his cattle," said Dave. "Let us walk over and see," and this was done.

Dave was correct in his surmise, and soon the boys approached a big cow-shed, through a win-

dow of which they saw the faint rays of a lantern. Just as they did this they heard a voice cry out in wonder.

"What be you fellers a-doin' in my cow-shed?"

"Oh, we just came in to rest out of the storm," was the answer, in a voice that sounded strangely familiar to Dave. "We are not going to hurt your shed any, or the cattle either."

"It's Mallory, of Rockville!" whispered Dave to his fellow students, naming the cadet who was the star hockey player of the military academy team.

"And Bazen and Holt are with him," added Phil, gazing through a partly-open doorway, and naming two other Rockville cadets.

"Hello, who's out there?" cried the owner of the cow-shed, and, lantern in hand, he turned to survey the newcomers.

"Why, it's Mr. Opper!" cried Sam. "Don't you remember me? I called last summer, to see some of your young lady boarders."

"Oh, yes, I remember you," replied Homer Opper. "You hired my dappled mare for a ride."

"That's it, Mr. Opper. Say, that mare could go."

"Go? Ain't no hossflesh in these parts kin beat her," cried the farmer proudly. "She won the prize at the last county fair, she did! But

wot brung ye here, sech a night as this?" added Homer Opper curiously.

"Hello, Porter, old man!" cried Mallory, rising from a box on which he had been seated and shaking hands. "Caught in the storm, too, eh?"

"Yes," answered Dave. He gazed curiously at the Rockville cadet and his companions. "Been up the river?"

"Not any further than this."

"Hunting?"

"No, skating. We would be going back, only Holt broke one of his skates and that delayed us. Been out hunting, eh? Any luck?"

"Some—good and bad. We shot some rabbits, squirrels, and partridges, and we likewise had our hamper, our skates, an overcoat, and some other things stolen."

"Stolen!" cried Homer Opper. "By gum, thet's tough luck! Who tuk the things?"

"That is what we want to find out," and as Dave spoke he looked sharply at Mallory and the other Rockville cadets.

"Not guilty," came promptly from Bazen. "Honest Injun, Porter, if you think we touched your things, you are on the wrong track; isn't that so, fellows?"

"It is," came promptly from Mallory and Holt. Then suddenly the star hockey player of Rock-

ville Academy let out a long, low whistle of surprise.

"You know something?" demanded Dave.

"Maybe I do," was Mallory's slow answer. "Yes, I am sure I do," he added. "You can put the puzzle together yourself if you wish, Porter—because, you see, I hate to accuse anybody."

"What do you know?"

"I know this: Less than an hour ago we met two fellows on the river, one with a hamper and the other with a bundle that looked as if it was done up in an overcoat turned inside out. We came on the fellows rather suddenly, at a turn where there were some bushes."

"Our stuff, as sure as you're a foot high!" cried Phil.

"Who were the fellows, do you know?" demanded the senator's son.

At this question Mallory looked at Holt and Bazen.

"I wasn't exactly sure, but——" He hesitated to go on.

"I was sure enough," chimed in Holt. "They were those chaps who came to our school from Oak Hall and then ran away—Jasniff and Merwell. How about it, Tom?"

"I think they were Jasniff and Merwell," answered Tom Bazen. "To be sure, as soon as they saw us, they skated away as fast as they could,

and kept their faces hidden. But if they weren't Jasniff and Merwell they were pretty good doubles."

"Jasniff and Merwell," murmured Dave, and his heart sank a little. Here was more underhanded work of his old enemies.

The farmer and the Rockville cadets were anxious to hear the particulars of the happening, and the Oak Hall lads told of what had occurred.

"I know those chaps," said Homer Opper. "They stayed here one night last summer. But they cut up so the boarders didn't like it, so my wife told 'em she didn't have no room for 'em, an' they left. They ought to be locked up."

"They will be locked up, if we can lay hands on them," replied Phil.

"They must have followed us to Squirrel Island, and spied on us," said Shadow. "Ben, you were right about seeing somebody. It must have been either Merwell or Jasniff."

"Have you any idea where they went?" asked the shipowner's son.

"No, they skated away behind an island and that's the last we saw of them," answered Mallory.

"Yes, and I reckon it's the last we'll hear of our things," returned Buster, mournfully. "But come on, let us see about getting back," he continued. "It's 'most time for supper now."

"Mr. Opper, can you take us back to Oak Hall?" asked Dave. "We'll pay you for your trouble."

The farmer looked at the students and rubbed his chin reflectively. Then he gazed out at the storm and the snow-covered ground.

"Might hook up my big sleigh and do it," he said. "But it would be quite a job."

"What would it be worth?" asked Ben.

"Oh, I dunno—three or four dollars, at least. It's a tough night to be out in—an' I'd have to drive back, or put up at the town all night."

"Supposing we gave you fifty cents apiece," suggested Roger.

"And we'll go along—as far as Rockville, at the same price—if you'll have us," added Mallory, quickly.

"Why, yes, Mallory, and welcome," answered Dave cordially. "That is, if the turnout will hold us all."

"Sure it will," answered Homer Opper. "An' if ye all go an' pay fifty cents each,"—he counted them mentally as he spoke—"I'll hook up my four hosses an' git ye there in jig time."

"Then it's a go," answered Dave, after his chums and the Rockville cadets had nodded their approval.

"And do hurry," called out Buster, as the

farmer moved away to prepare for the journey. "We don't want to miss our suppers."

"Ye ain't goin' to miss nuthin'," called the farmer.

Inside of fifteen minutes he came around to the cow-shed with a big, low sleigh, to which were attached four fine-looking horses. The sleigh contained two lanterns and a quantity of wraps and robes.

"Don't want ye to catch cold, when we're a-drivin' fast," chuckled Homer Opper. "Now pile right in, an' we'll be movin'."

The boys needed no second invitation, and soon all were aboard—Dave and Roger on the front seat with the driver and the others behind, including the Rockville cadets. Then came a crack of the whip, and away through the swirling snow moved the big sleigh, bound for the two schools.

CHAPTER VI

GOOD-BY TO OAK HALL

"WHERE in the world have you boys been? Why didn't you come back in time for supper? Don't you know it is against the rules to stay away like this?"

Thus it was that Job Haskers, the second assistant teacher of Oak Hall, greeted Dave and his chums as they came in, after leaving the big sleigh and settling with Homer Opper.

"We are sorry that we couldn't get here before, Mr. Haskers," answered Dave. "But something unusual happened and we were delayed."

"I'll not accept any excuses!" snapped the teacher, who had not forgotten how the boys had hurried away without listening to his call from the window. "I think I'll send you to bed supperless. It is no more than you deserve."

"Supperless!" gasped Buster, in dismay. "Oh, Mr. Haskers, we don't deserve such treatment, really we don't!"

"We have been robbed—that is what delayed

us," declared Phil. "I guess we had better report to Doctor Clay, or Mr. Dale," he went on, significantly.

"You can report to me," answered Job Haskers, with increased severity. "There is no need to bother the doctor, and Mr. Dale has gone away for over Sunday."

"Well, boys, back again!" cried a cheery voice from an upper landing, and then Doctor Clay came down, wearing his gown and slippers. "A wild storm to be out in. I am glad you got back safely."

"They are late—and you said you gave them no permission to be out after hours," said Job Haskers, tartly.

"Hum! Did I?" mused the kindly head of the school. "Well, when it storms like this it, of course, makes some difference."

"We would have been back in time only we were robbed of our skates and some other things," answered Dave. "We had to walk a long distance through the storm, and we'd not be here yet if we hadn't managed to hire a farmer to bring us in his sleigh."

"Robbed!" echoed Doctor Clay, catching at the word. "How was that?" And he listened with keen interest to what the boys had to tell. Even Job Haskers became curious, and said no more about penalizing them for being late.

"And you are sure the fellows were Merwell and Jasniff?" asked the assistant teacher.

"All I know on that point is what Mallory and his chums had to say," answered Dave.

"I think it would be like that pair to follow you up," said Doctor Clay, with a grave shake of his head. "They are two very bad boys,—worse, Porter, than you can imagine," and he looked knowingly at Job Haskers as he spoke. "Now go in to supper, and after that, you, Porter, Morr, and Lawrence, may come to my study and talk the matter over further."

Wondering what else had happened to upset the head of the school, Dave followed his chums to the dining-hall. Here a late supper awaited the crowd, to which, it is perhaps needless to state, all did full justice.

"Do you think we can track Jasniff and Merwell?" asked the senator's son, during the course of the repast.

"I don't," answered Dave frankly. "For they will do their best to keep out of our way."

A little later found Dave, Phil, and Roger in the doctor's private study, a sort of library connected with his regular office. The head of Oak Hall was reading a German historical work, but laid the volume down as they filed in.

"Sit down, boys," said Doctor Clay, pleasantly, and when they were seated, he added: "Now

kindly tell me all you know about Merwell and Jasniff."

"Do you want to know everything, Doctor? asked Dave, in some surprise.

"Yes,—and later on, I'll tell you why."

"All right," answered the youth from Crumville, and he told of the many things that had happened, both at the school and at home—not forgetting about the auto ride in which Laura and Jessie were supposed to have participated.

"It all fits in!" cried Doctor Clay, drawing a deep sigh. He tapped the table with the tips of his fingers. "I wonder where it will end?" he mused, half to himself.

"You said that Merwell and Jasniff were worse than we imagined," suggested Dave, to draw the doctor out.

"So I did, Porter. I will tell you boys something, but please do not let it go any further. Since Jasniff and Merwell became pupils at Rockville Military Academy and since they ran away from that institution they have been doing everything they could think of to annoy me. They have sent farmers here with produce that I never ordered, and have had publishers send me schoolbooks that I did not want. Worse than that, they have circulated reports to my scholars' parents that this school was running down, that it was in debt, and that some pupils were getting sick because

the sewerage system was out of order. Some of the parents have written to me, and two were on the point of taking their boys away, thinking the reports were true. Fortunately I was able to prove the reports false, and the boys remained here. But I do not know how far these slanders are being circulated and what the effect will be in the future."

"And you are sure they come from Merwell and Jasniff?" questioned Phil.

"I am sure at least one letter was written by Merwell, and one farmer who brought a load of cabbages here said they were ordered by two young men who looked like Merwell and Jasniff."

"Oh, nobody else would do it!" cried Roger. "Merwell and Jasniff are guilty, not the least doubt of it! The question is: How can we catch them?"

"Yes, that is the question," said Doctor Clay. "I have notified the local authorities to be on the watch for them, and now I think I shall hire a private detective."

"Do it, Doctor," said Dave eagerly. "I will pay half the expense. I know that my father will approve of such a course." And so the matter rested. The private detective came to Oak Hall two days later, and after interviewing the doctor and the boys, said he would do his best to run down Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff.

It snowed hard for a day and a night and when

it cleared off the boys had considerable fun snowballing each other and in coasting down a long hill leading to the river. Pop Swingly, the janitor, came in for his full share of the snow-balling and so did Jackson Lemond, usually called Horsehair, the Hall carryall driver. Horsehair was caught coming from the barn, and half a dozen snowballs hit him at the same time.

"Hi, you, stop!" he spluttered, as one snowball took him in the chin and another in the ear. "Want to smother me? Let up, I say!" And he tried to run away.

"These are early Christmas presents, Horsehair!" sang out Ben, merrily, and let the driver have another, this time in the cap.

"And something to remember us by, when we are gone," added Gus, hitting him in the arm. Then the driver escaped. He felt sore, and vowed he would square up.

"Maybe he'll report us," said Ben, after the excitement was over.

"Not he," declared Gus. "He's not that kind. But he'll lay for us,—just you wait and see." And Gus was right. About half an hour later he and Ben were told that somebody wanted to see them at the boathouse. They started for the building, walking past the gymnasium, and as they did so, down on their heads came a perfect avalanche of snow, sent from the sloping roof above. When

they clawed their way out of the mass and looked up they saw Horsehair standing on the roof, snow-shovel in hand, grinning at them.

"Thought I'd give ye some more snow fer snowballs," he chuckled. "Here ye are!" And down came another avalanche, sending the boys flat a second time. When they scrambled up they ran off with all speed, the merry laughter of the carryall driver ringing in their ears.

At last came the final session of the school, with the usual exercises, in which Dave and his chums participated. Nearly all of the boys were going home for the holidays, including Dave, Phil, Roger, and Ben. Dave and Ben were, of course, going direct to Crumville, and it was arranged that Phil and the senator's son should come there later, to visit our hero and his family and the Wadsworths. Nat Poole was also going home, and would be on the same train with Dave and Ben.

"I wish he wasn't going with us," said Ben. "I'm getting so I can't bear Nat at all."

"Well, he isn't quite as bad as he was when he chummed with Merwell and Jasniff," answered our hero. "I think their badness rather scared Nat. He is mean and all that, but he isn't a criminal."

"Well, I think some meanness is a crime," retorted Ben.

The boys had purchased gifts for Doctor Clay,

Mr. Dale, and some of the others, and even Job Haskers had been remembered. Some of the students had wanted to ignore the tyrannical teacher, but Dave and his chums had voted down this proposition.

"Let us treat them all alike," said Dave. "Perhaps Mr. Haskers thinks he is doing right."

"Yes, and if we leave him out in the cold he may be more hard-hearted than ever," added Gus, with a certain amount of worldly wisdom.

Dave carried a suit-case and also a big bundle, the latter filled with Christmas presents for the folks at home. Ben was similarly loaded down, and so were the others.

"Good-by, everybody!" cried our hero, as he entered the carryall sleigh. "Take good care of the school until we come back!"

"Good-by!" was the answer. "Don't eat too much turkey while you are gone!" And then, as the sleigh rolled away from the school grounds, the lads to leave commenced to sing the favorite school song, sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne":

"Oak Hall we never shall forget,
No matter where we roam;
It is the very best of schools,
To us it's just like home!
Then give three cheers, and let them ring
Throughout this world so wide,
To let the people know that we
Elect to here abide!"

"That's the stuff!" cried Roger, and then commenced to toot loudly on a tin horn he carried, and many others made a din.

At the depot the boys had to wait a little while. But presently the train came along and they got aboard. Dave and Ben found a seat near the middle of the car and Nat Poole sat close by them. He acted as if he wanted to talk, but the others gave him little encouragement.

"Nat has something on his mind, I'll wager a cookie," whispered Ben to Dave.

"Well, if he has, he need not bother us with it," was Dave's reply. "I am done with him—I told him that some time ago."

The train rolled on and when near the Junction, where the boys had to change to the main line, a couple in front of Ben and Dave got up, leaving the seat vacant. At once Nat Poole took the seat, at first, however, turning it over, so that he might face the other Oak Hall students.

"I want to talk to you, Dave Porter," he said, in a low and somewhat ugly voice. "I want you to give an account of yourself."

"Give an account of myself?" queried Dave, in some astonishment, for he had not expected such an opening from Nat. "What do you mean?"

"You know well enough what I mean," cried the other boy, and now it was plainly

to be seen that his anger was rising. "You can blacken your own character all you please but I won't have you blackening mine! If you don't confess to what you've done, and straighten matters out, as soon as we get to Crumville, I am going to ask my father to have you arrested!"

CHAPTER VII

NAT POOLE'S REVELATION

BOTH Dave and Ben stared in astonishment at the son of the money-lender of Crumville. Nat was highly indignant, but the reason for this was a complete mystery to the other lads.

"Blacken your character?" repeated Dave. "Nat, what are you talking about?"

"You know well enough."

"I do not."

"And I say you do!" blustered the bully. "You can't crawl out of it. I've followed the thing up and I've got the evidence against you, and against Roger Morr, too. I was going to speak to Doctor Clay about it, but I know he'd side with you and smooth it over—he always does. But if I tell my father, you'll find you have a different man to deal with!"

Nat spoke in a high-pitched voice that drew the attention of half a dozen men and women in the car. Ben was greatly annoyed.

"Say, Nat, don't make a public exhibition of yourself," he said, in a low tone. "If you've got

anything against Dave, why don't you wait until we are alone?"

"I don't have to wait," answered Nat, as loudly as ever. "I am going to settle this thing right now."

Fortunately the train rolled up to the Junction depot at this moment and everybody, including the boys, left the car. Several gazed curiously at Dave and Nat, and, seeing this, Ben led the others to the end of the platform. Here there was a freight room, just then deserted.

"Come on in here, and then, Nat, you can spout all you please," said Ben.

"You ain't going to catch me in a corner!" cried the bully, in some alarm.

"It isn't that, Nat. I don't want you to make a fool of yourself in front of the whole crowd. See how everybody is staring at you."

"Humph! Let them stare," muttered the bully; yet he followed Ben and Dave into the freight room, and Ben stood at the doorway, so that no outsiders might come in. One boy tried to get in, thinking possibly to see a fight, but Ben told him to "fly on, son," and the lad promptly disappeared.

"Now then, Nat, tell me what you are driving at," said Dave, as calmly as he could, for he saw that the money-lender's son was growing more enraged every minute.

"I don't have to tell you, Dave Porter; you know all about it."

"I tell you I don't—I haven't the least idea what you are driving at."

"Maybe you'll deny that you were at Leesburgh last week."

"Leesburgh?"

"Yes, Leesburgh, at Sampson's Hotel, and at the Arcade moving-picture and vaudeville show," and as he uttered the words Nat fairly glared into the face of our hero.

"I haven't been near Leesburgh for several months—not since a crowd of us went there to a football game."

"Humph! You expect me to believe that?"

"Believe it or not, it is true."

"You can't pull the wool over my eyes, Dave Porter! I know you were at Leesburgh last week Wednesday, you and Roger Morr. And I know you went to Sampson's Hotel and registered in my name and then cut up like a rowdy there, in the pool-room, and got thrown out, and I know you and Roger Morr went to the Arcade and made a fuss there, and got thrown out again, but not until you had given my name and the name of Gus Plum. Gus may forgive you for it, and think it only a joke. But I'll not do it, I can tell you that! You have got to write a letter to the

owner of that hotel and to the theater manager and explain things, and you and Roger Morr have got to beg my pardon. And if you don't, as I said before, I'll tell my father and get him to have you arrested." And now Nat was so excited he moved from one foot to the other and shook his fist in the air.

To the bully's surprise Dave did not get excited. On the contrary, our hero's face showed something that was akin to a faint smile. Ben saw it and wondered at it.

"Say, you needn't laugh at me!" howled Nat, noting the look. "Before I get through with you, you'll find it no laughing matter."

"I am not laughing at you, Nat."

"Well, do you admit that what I've said is true?"

"No; on the contrary, I say it is false, every word of it. Did you say this happened last Wednesday?"

"I did."

"Both Roger Morr and I were at the school all day Wednesday. During the day I attended all my classes, and after school I went to my room, along with Polly Vane, Luke Watson, and Sam Day, and the three of us wrote on the essays we had to hand in Thursday. After supper we went down to the gym for about half an hour,

and then went back to our dormitory. And, come to think of it, you saw us there," added Dave suddenly.

"I saw you?"

"You certainly did. You came to the door and asked Luke Watson for a Latin book; don't you remember? Luke got it out of his bureau. We were all at the big table. Sam Day flipped a button at you and it hit you in the chin."

At these unexpected words the face of the money-lender's son fell.

"Was that—er—was that Wednesday?" he faltered.

"It certainly was, for we had to hand the essays in Thursday and we were all working like beavers on them."

"Nat, what Dave says is absolutely true—I know he wasn't near Leesburgh last week, for I was with him every day and every evening," said Ben.

"But I got the word from some fellows in Leesburgh. They followed you from the hotel to the show and talked to you afterwards, and they said you told them your name was Porter, and the other chap said his name was Morr. They said you gave the names of Poole and Plum just to keep your real identity hidden."

"Well, I am not guilty, Nat; I give you my word of honor on it."

"But—but—if you aren't guilty how is it those fellows got your name and that of Morr?" asked the money-lender's son, not knowing what else to say.

"I think I can explain it, Nat. The same fellows who did that are annoying me in other ways. But I'll not explain unless you will give me your word of honor to keep it a secret, at least for the present."

"A secret, why?"

"Because I don't want the thing talked about in public. The more you talk about such things the worse off you are. Let me tell you that I have suffered more than you have, and other folks have suffered too."

"Do you mean to say that some other fellows did this and gave my name and Plum's first and yours and Morr's afterwards?" asked Nat, curiously.

"Exactly."

"Why?"

"For a twofold reason; first to blacken your character and that of Plum, and, secondly, to cause trouble between all of us."

"What fellows would be mean enough to do that?"

"Two fellows who used to be your friends, but who have had to run away, to keep from being arrested."

"Say, you don't mean Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff!" burst out the money-lender's son.

"Those are the chaps I do mean, Nat."

"But I thought they had left these parts. They were in Crumville, I know," and now the bully looked knowingly at our hero.

"You have heard the reports from home then?" asked Dave, and he felt his face burn.

"Sure."

"Nat, those reports are all false—as false as this report of your doings at Leesburgh. They are gotten up by Jasniff and Merwell solely to injure my friends and my family and me. My sister and Jessie Wadsworth would refuse to even recognize those fellows, much less go auto-riding with them. Let me tell you something." And in as few words as possible our hero related how things had been sent to him and his friends without being ordered by them, and of the other trouble Jasniff and Merwell were causing. The money-lender's son was incredulous at first, but gradually his face relaxed.

"And is all that really so?" he asked, at last.

"Every word is absolutely true," answered Dave.

"Then Nick and Link ought to be in jail!" burst out Nat. "It's an outrage to let them do

such things. Why don't you have 'em locked up—that is what I'd do!"

"We've got to catch them first."

"Do you mean to say you are trying to do that?"

"We are."

"Well, you catch 'em, and if you want me to appear against 'em, I'll do it—and I'll catch 'em myself if I can."

There was a pause, and Nat started for the doorway of the freight room. But Ben still barred the way.

"Nat, don't you think you were rather hasty in accusing Dave?" he asked, bluntly.

"Well—er—maybe I was," answered the money-lender's son, growing a bit red.

"Oh, let it pass," said Dave. "I might have been worked up myself, if I had been in Nat's place."

"Here comes the train—we don't want to miss it," cried the money-lender's son, and he showed that he was glad to close the interview. "Remember, if you catch those fellows, I'll testify against 'em!" he called over his shoulder as he pushed through the doorway.

"The same old Nat, never willing to acknowledge himself in the wrong," was Ben's comment, as he and Dave ran for the car steps. The other boy had lost himself in the waiting crowd and

got into another car, and they did not see him again until Crumville was reached, and even then he did not speak to them.

The snow was coming down lightly when Dave and Ben alighted, baggage and bundles in hand, for they had not risked checking anything in such a crowd. Ben's father was on hand to greet him, and close at hand stood the Wadsworth family sleigh, with Laura and Jessie on the rear seat. The driver came to take the suit-case and Dave's bundle, grinning a welcome as he did so.

"There's Dave!" cried Jessie, as soon as he appeared. "Isn't he growing tall!" she added.

"Yes," answered the sister. "Dave!" she called.

"Here we are again!" he cried with a bright smile, and shook hands. "I brought you a snow-storm for a change."

"I like snow for Christmas," answered Jessie. She was blushing, for Dave had given her hand an extra tight squeeze.

"How are the folks?"

"All very well," answered Laura. "What have you in that big bundle?"

"Oh, that's a secret, sis," he returned.

"Christmas presents!" cried the sister. "Jessie, let us open the bundle right away." And she made a playful reach for it.

"Not to-day—that belongs to Santa Claus!"

"HERE WE ARE AGAIN!"—*Page 66.*

cried the brother, holding the bundle out of reach. "My, but this town looks good to me!" he added, as he looked around and waved his hand to Mr. Basswood. Then Ben took a moment to run up and greet the girls.

"You must come over, Ben," said Laura.

"Why, yes, by all means," added Jessie, and Ben said he would. Then he rejoined his father, and Dave got into the sleigh, being careful to keep his big bundle on his lap, where the girls could not "poke a hole into it to peek," as he put it. There was a flourish of the whip, and the elegant turnout, with its well-matched black horses, started in the direction of the Wadsworth mansion.

CHAPTER VIII

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

As my old readers know, the Wadsworth family and the Porters all lived together, for when Dave found his folks and brought them to Crumville, the rich jewelry manufacturer and his wife could not bear to think of separating from the boy who had saved their daughter from being burned to death. They loved Dave almost as a son, and it was their proposal that the Porters make the big mansion their home. As Dave's father was a widower and his brother Dunston was a bachelor, they readily agreed to this, provided they were allowed to share the expenses. With the two families was old Caspar Potts, who spent most of his time in the library, cataloguing the books, keeping track of the magazines, and writing a volume on South American history.

With a merry jingling of the bells, the family sleigh drove into the spacious grounds. As it rounded the driveway and came to a halt at the front piazza the door opened and Dave's father came out, followed by Dunston Porter.

"Hello, Dad!" cried the son, joyously, and

made a flying leap from the sleigh. "How are you?" And then he shook hands with his parent and with his uncle—that same uncle whom he so strongly resembled,—a resemblance that had been the means of bringing the pair together.

"Dave, my son!" said Mr. Porter, as he smiled a welcome.

"Getting bigger every day, Davy!" was Uncle Dunston's comment. "Before you know it, you'll be taller than I am!" And he gave his nephew a hand-clasp that made Dave wince.

"Oh, he's getting awfully tall, I said so as soon as I saw him," remarked Jessie, as she, too, alighted, followed by Laura. By this time Dave was in the hallway, giving Mrs. Wadsworth a big hug and a kiss. When he had first known her, Dave had been a little afraid of Mrs. Wadsworth, she was such a lady, but now this was past and he treated her as she loved to be treated, just as if he were her son.

"Aren't you glad I've returned to torment you?" he said, as he gave her another squeeze.

"Very glad, Dave, very glad indeed!" she answered, beaming on him. "I don't mind the way you torment me in the least," and then she hurried off, to make sure that the dinner ordered in honor of Dave's home-coming should be properly served.

In the library doorway stood Caspar Potts, his

hair now as white as snow. He came forward and laid two trembling white hands in those of Dave.

"Dave, my boy Dave!" he murmured, and his watery eyes fairly glistened.

"Yes, Professor, your boy, always your boy!" answered Dave, readily, for he loved the old instructor from the bottom of his heart. "And how is the history getting on?"

"Fairly well, Dave. I have nine chapters finished."

"Good! Some day, when it is finished, I'll find a publisher for you; and then you'll be famous."

"I don't know about that, Dave. But I like to write on the book—and the research work is very pleasant, especially in such pleasant surroundings," murmured the old gentleman.

Mr Wadsworth was away at his office, but presently he came back, and greeted Dave warmly, and asked about the school and his chums. Then, as the girls went off to get ready for dinner, the men folks and Dave went into the library.

"Have you heard anything more of those two young rascals, Merwell and Jasniff?" questioned Mr. Porter.

"Yes, but not in the way I'd like," answered Dave, and told of what Nat Poole had had to

say and of what had occurred at Squirrel Island. "Have you heard anything here?" he added.

"Did the girls tell you anything?" asked his father.

"Not a word—they didn't have a chance, for we didn't want to talk before Peter." Peter was the driver of the sleigh.

"I see." Mr. Porter mused for a moment and looked at Mr. Wadsworth.

"Those good-for-nothing boys have done a number of mean things," said the jewelry manufacturer. "They have circulated many reports, about you and your family, and about me and my family. They must be very bitter, to act in such a fashion. If I could catch them, I'd like to wring their necks!" And Oliver Wadsworth showed his excitement by pacing up and down the library.

"Did you get your affairs with the department stores fixed up?"

"Yes, but not without considerable trouble."

"Have Jasniff and Merwell shown themselves in Crumville lately?"

"Yes, three days ago they followed your sister Laura and Jessie to a church fair the girls attended. They acted in such a rude fashion that both of the girls ran all the way home. All of us went out to look for them, but we didn't find them."

"Oh, if I had only been at that fair!" murmured Dave.

"What could you have done against two of them?" asked his uncle.

"I don't know, but I would have made it warm for them—and maybe handed them over to the police."

"I have cautioned the girls to be on their guard," said David Porter. "And you must be on your guard, Dave. It is not wise to take chances with such fellows as Jasniff and Merwell."

"I'll keep my eyes open for them," answered the son.

Dave ran up to his room, and put his big bundle away in a corner of the clothing closet. Then he dressed for dinner. As he came out he met Jessie, who stood on the landing with a white carnation in her hand.

"It's for your buttonhole," she said. "It's the largest in the conservatory." And she adjusted it skillfully. He watched her in silence, and when she had finished he caught her by both hands.

"Jessie, I'm so glad to be back—so glad to be with you again!" he half whispered.

"Are you really, Dave?" she returned, and her eyes were shining like stars.

"You know I am; don't you?" he pleaded.

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice. And then,

as Laura appeared, she added hastily, but tenderly, "I'm glad, too!"

It was a large and happy gathering around the dining-room table, with Mr. Wadsworth at the head, and Jessie on one side of Dave and Laura on the other. Professor Potts asked the blessing, and then followed an hour of good cheer. In honor of Dave's home-coming the meal was an elaborate one, and everybody enjoyed it thoroughly. As nobody wished to put a damper on the occasion, nothing was said about their enemies. Dave told some funny stories about Oak Hall happenings, and had the girls shrieking with laughter, and Dunston Porter related a tale or two about his travels, for he still loved to roam as of yore.

The next day—the day before Christmas—it snowed heavily. But the young folks did not mind this and went out several times, to do the last of their shopping. Late in the afternoon, Peter brought in some holly wreaths and a little Christmas tree. The wreaths were placed in the windows, each with a big bow of red ribbon attached, and the tree was decorated with candies and candles and placed on the table in the living-room.

All the young folks had surprises for their parents and for Professor Potts. There was a set of South American maps for the old professor,

a new rifle for Dunston Porter, a set of cyclopedias for Mr. Wadsworth, a cane for Dave's father, and a beautiful chocolate urn for the lady of the house.

"Merry Christmas!" was the cry that went the rounds the next morning, and then such a handshaking and such a gift-giving and receiving! Dave had a new pocketbook for Laura, with her monogram in silver, and a cardcase for Mrs. Wadsworth. For Jessie he had a string of pearls, and numerous gifts for the others in the mansion. From Laura he received a fine book on hunting and camping out, something he had long desired, while Mrs. Wadsworth gave him some silk handkerchiefs. From his father came a new suit-case, one with a traveler's outfit included, and from his uncle he received some pictures, to hang in his den. Mr. Wadsworth gave him a beautiful stickpin, one he said had been made at his own works.

But the gift Dave prized most of all was a little locket that Jessie gave him for his watchchain. It was of gold, set with tiny diamonds, and his monogram was on the back. The locket opened and had a place in it for two pictures.

"You must put Laura's picture in there," said Jessie, "Laura's and your father's."

"No, I have them already—in my watch case," he answered, and then, as nobody was near, he

went on in a whisper, "I want your picture in this, Jessie."

"Oh!" she murmured.

"Your picture on one side, and a lock of your hair on the other. Without those I won't consider the gift complete."

"Oh, Dave, don't be silly!"

"I'm not silly—I mean it, Jessie. You'll give them to me, won't you, before I go back to Oak Hall?"

"Maybe. I'll see how you behave!" was the answer, and then just as Dave started to catch her by the arm, she ran away to join Laura. But she threw him a smile from over her shoulder that meant a great deal to him.

In the afternoon, Ben came over, with his young lady cousin, and all the young folks went sleigh-riding. The evening was spent at the Wadsworth mansion in playing games and in singing favorite songs. Altogether it was a Christmas to be long remembered.

During the fall Mr. Wadsworth had been busy, building an addition to his jewelry works, and on the day after Christmas Dave went over to the place with his uncle, to look around. The addition covered a plot nearly a hundred feet square and was two stories high.

"It will give us a new office and several new departments," said the rich manufacturer, as he

showed them around. "When everything is finished I shall have one of the most up-to-date jewelry works in this part of the country."

"Are you going to move the old office furniture into this new place?" asked Dave, noticing some old chairs and desks.

"For the present we'll have to. The new furniture won't be here until early in January."

"What about your safes?" asked Dave. He remembered the big but old-fashioned safes that had adorned the old office.

"We are to have new ones in about sixty days. I wanted them at once, but the safe company was too busy to rush the order. I wish now that I had those safes," went on the manufacturer, in a lower voice, so that even the clerks near by might not hear.

"Why, anything unusual?" questioned Dunston Porter, curiously.

"I took that order to reset the Carwith diamonds, that's all."

"Oh, then you got it, didn't you?" went on Dave's uncle. "Were they willing to pay the price?"

"I told them they would have to or I wouldn't touch the job."

"What do you suppose the diamonds are worth?"

"They were bought for sixty thousand dollars.

At the present value of such gems, I should say at least seventy-five thousand dollars."

"Phew! And the settings are to cost eight thousand dollars. That makes a pretty valuable lot of jewelry, I'm thinking," was Dunston Porter's comment.

"You are right, and that is why I wish I had those new safes," added Oliver Wadsworth.

"Can't you keep the diamonds in some safe deposit vault?"

"There is no very good safe deposit place in Crumville. Besides, I must have the gems here, if my workmen are to set them properly. Of course, I'll keep them in the old safes when they are not in the workshop."

"I should think you'd want a watchman around with such diamonds in the place," remarked Dave.

"I have a watchman—old Tony Wells, who is as honest as they make 'em. But, Dave, I don't want you to mention the diamonds to anybody. The fact that I have this order is being kept a secret," went on Mr. Wadsworth, anxiously.

"I'll not say a word to anybody," answered our hero.

"Don't do it—for I am anxious enough about the jewels as it is. I shall be glad when the order is finished and the gems are out of my keeping. I don't want any outsider to know I have them."

CHAPTER IX

NAT POOLE GETS CAUGHT

In the middle of the week came Phil and Roger, in the midst of another snowstorm that was so heavy it threatened to stall the train in which they arrived. Dave went to the station to meet them.

"Say, what do you think?" burst out Phil, while shaking hands.

"We saw Jasniff and Merwell!" finished the senator's son.

"You did!" ejaculated Dave. "Where?"

"On our train. We walked through the cars at Melton, to see if we knew anybody aboard, and there were the pair in the smoker, smoking cigarettes, as big as life."

"Did you speak to them?"

"Didn't get the chance. The car was crowded, and before we could get to Jasniff and Merwell they saw us, ran down the aisle the other way, and got off."

"Is that so? Evidently they must know we are on their track," said Dave, shaking his head gravely.

"I wish we could have collared 'em," went on the shipowner's son. "I'd like to punch their heads."

"Don't do it, Phil. If you ever catch them, call an officer and have them locked up. A thrashing is wasted on such rascals."

"Do you know some more about them?" questioned Roger, quickly.

"I do." And then Dave related what Nat Poole had had to say, and also told about how Laura and Jessie had been scared when attending the church fair.

"You are right, they ought to be locked up," was Roger's comment.

"By the way, did you hear the news from Oak Hall?" went on Phil, as they drove off towards the Wadsworth mansion.

"What news?"

"Somehow or other, the storm lifted off two of the skylights from the roof of the main building and the snow got in the garret and there the heat from the chimney must have melted it, for it ran down—the water did—through the floor and loosened the plaster in several of the dormitories, including ours. I understand all of the plaster has got to come down."

"What a muss!"

"Yes, and it is going to take several weeks to fix it up—they couldn't get any masons right away."

"Then where will we sleep when we go back?"

"I don't know. I understand from Shadow that the doctor was thinking of keeping the school closed until about the first of February."

"Say, that will give us quite a holiday!" exclaimed Dave.

"For which all of us will be profoundly sorry," responded Phil, making a sober face and winking one eye.

The girls greeted the newcomers with sincere pleasure.

"What a pity Belle Endicott isn't here," sighed Laura.

"So it is," answered Jessie. "We'll have to do what we can to make up for her absence."

Two days later it cleared off, and the young folks enjoyed a long sleigh-ride. Then they went skating, and on New Year's Eve attended a party given at Ben Basswood's house. Besides our friends, Ben had invited Sam Day and Buster Beggs, and also a number of girls; and all enjoyed themselves hugely until after midnight. When the clock struck twelve, the boys and girls went outside and tooted horns and rang a big dinner-bell, and wished each other and everybody else "A Happy New Year!"

The celebration on the front piazza was at its height when suddenly came a shower of snow-

balls from a near street corner. One snowball hit Dave in the shoulder and another landed directly on Jessie's neck, causing the girl to cry out in mingled pain and alarm.

"Hi! who's throwing snowballs!" exclaimed Roger, and then came another volley, and he was hit, and also Laura and one of the other girls. At once the girls fled into the house.

"Some rowdies, I suppose," said Phil. "I've half a mind to go after them."

"We can't without our hats and coats," answered Dave.

Just then came another shower of snowballs and Dave was hit again. This was too much for him, and despite the fact that he was bare-headed and wore a fine party suit, he leaped down on the sidewalk and started for the corner. Phil and Roger came after him. Ben rushed into the hallway, to catch up two of his father's canes and his chums' hats, and then he followed.

Those who had thrown the snowballs had not dreamed of being attacked, and it was not until Dave was almost on them that they started to run. There were three boys—two rather rough-looking characters. The third was well dressed, in a fur cap and overcoat lined with fur.

"Nat Poole!" cried Dave, when he got close to the well-dressed youth. "So this is your game, eh? Because Ben didn't see fit to invite you to

his party, you think it smart to throw snowballs at the girls!"

As he spoke Dave ran closer and suddenly gave the money-lender's son a shove that sent him backwards in the snow.

"Hi, you let me alone!" burst out Nat, in alarm. "It ain't fair to knock me down!"

By this time Dave's chums had reached the scene, and seeing Nat down they gave their attention to the two others. They saw that they were roughs who hung around the railroad station and the saloons of Crumville. Without waiting, Ben threw a cane to Roger and sailed in, and the senator's son followed. Both of the roughs received several severe blows and were then glad enough to slink away in the darkness.

When Nat got up he was thoroughly angry. He had hired the roughs to help him and now they had deserted the cause. He glared at Dave.

"You let me alone, Dave Porter!" he cried.

"Not just yet, Nat," replied our hero, and catching up a handful of loose snow, he forced it down inside of the other's collar. Then the other lads pitched in, too, and soon Nat found himself down once more and all but covered with snow, which got down his neck, in his ears and nose, and even into his mouth.

"Now then, don't you dare to throw snowballs

"The casket—the Carwith casket is gone!"—*Page 96.*

at the girls again!" said Dave sternly. "It was a cowardly thing to do, and you know it."

"If you do it again, we'll land on you ten times harder than we did just now," added Ben.

"And don't you get any more of those roughs to take a hand," continued Dave. "If you do, they'll find themselves in the lock-up, and you'll be there to keep them company."

"You just wait!" muttered Nat, wrathfully. "I'll fix you yet—you see if I don't!" And then he turned and hurried away, but not in the direction his companions had taken. He wanted to escape them if possible, for he had promised each a dollar for aiding him and he was now in no humor to hand over the money. But at another corner the roughs caught up to him and made him pay up, and this added to his disgust.

When Dave and the others got back to the house they were considerably "roughed up," as Roger expressed it. But they had vanquished the enemy and were correspondingly happy. They found that the girls had not been much hurt, for which everybody was thankful.

"Maybe they'll lay for you when you go home," whispered Ben to Dave, when he got the chance.

"I don't think they will," answered Dave. "But we'll be on our guard."

"Why not take a cane or two with you?"

"We can do that."

When it came time to go home the girls were somewhat timid, and Jessie said she could telephone for the sleigh. But, as it was a bright, starry night, the boys said they would rather walk, and Laura said the same.

In spite of their watchfulness, the boys were full of fun, and soon had the girls laughing. And if, under those bright stars, Dave said some rather sentimental things to Jessie, for whom he had such a tender regard, who can blame him?

On the day following New Year's came word from Oak Hall that the school would not open for its next term until the first Monday in February.

"Say, that suits me down to the ground!" cried Phil.

"Well, I'm not shedding any tears," answered Roger. "I know what I'd like to do—take a trip somewhere."

"I don't know where you'd go in this winter weather," said Dave.

"Oh, some warm climate—Bermuda, or some place like that."

Another day slipped by, and Dave was asked by his father to go to one of the near-by cities on an errand of importance. He had to go to a lawyer's office and to several banks, and the errand took all day. For company he took Roger with

him, and the boys did not get back to Crumville until about eleven o'clock at night.

"Guess they thought we weren't coming at all," said Dave, when he found no sleigh awaiting him. "Well, we can walk."

"Of course we can walk," answered the senator's son. "I'll be glad to stretch my legs after such a long ride."

"Let us take a short cut," went on Dave, as they left the depot. "I know a path that leads almost directly to our place."

"All right, if the snow isn't too deep, Dave."

"It can't be deep on the path, for many of the men who work at the Wadsworth jewelry place use it. It runs right past the Wadsworth works."

"Go ahead then."

They took to the path, which led past the freight depot and then along a high board fence. They turned a corner of the fence, and crossed a vacant lot, and then came up to one corner of the jewelry works, at a point where the new addition was located.

"Now, here we are at the works," said Dave. "It's not very much further to the house."

"Pretty quiet around here, this time of night," remarked Roger, as he paused to catch his breath, for they had been walking fast. "There doesn't seem to be a soul in sight."

"There is usually a watchman around, old

Tony Wells, an army veteran. I suppose he is inside somewhere."

"There's his lantern!" cried the senator's son, as a flash of light shone from one of the windows. Hardly had he spoken when the light disappeared, leaving the building as black as before.

"It must be a lonely job, guarding such a place," said our hero, as he and his chum resumed their walk. "But I suppose it suits Tony Wells, and he is glad to get the money it brings in."

"They must have a lot of valuable jewelry there, Dave."

"Oh, yes, they have. But it is all locked up in the safes at night." Dave thought of the Car-with diamonds, but remembered his promise not to mention them to anybody.

As the boys turned another corner they came face to face with a fat man, who was struggling along through the snow carrying two heavy bundles.

"Hello!" cried Dave. "How are you, Mr. Rowell?"

"Bless me if it isn't Dave Porter!" cried Amos Rowell, who was a local druggist. "Out rather late, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"So am I. Had to visit some sick folks and I'm carrying home some of their washing. Good-

night!" and the druggist turned down one road and Dave and Roger took the other.

Inside of five minutes more our hero and his chum were at the entrance to the Wadsworth mansion. Just as they were mounting the steps, and Dave was feeling in his pocket for his key, a strange rumble reached their ears.

"What was that?" asked the senator's son.

"I don't know," returned Dave, in some alarm. "It sounded to me as if it came from the direction of the jewelry works!"

CHAPTER X

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE JEWELRY WORKS

"THE jewelry works?" repeated Roger.

"Yes. What did it sound like to you?"

"Why, like a blast of some kind. Maybe it was at the railroad."

"They don't work on the railroad at night—especially in this cold weather, Roger. No, it was something else."

Both boys halted on the piazza and listened. But not another sound out of the ordinary reached their ears.

"Might as well go in—it's getting pretty cold," said the senator's son.

Dave unlocked the door and they entered the mansion. A dim light was burning in the hallway. While they were taking off their caps and coats Dave's father appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Got back safely, did you?" he questioned.

"Yes, dad; and everything in the city was all right," answered the son. "I'll bring the package up to you."

"Never mind—I'll come down and put it in

the safe," answered Mr. Porter. "By the way," he went on, "what was that strange noise I just heard?"

"That is what we were wondering," said Roger. "It sounded like a blast of dynamite to me."

"Maybe something blew up at the powder works at Fenwood," suggested Dave. The works in question were fifteen miles away.

"If it did, we'll hear about it in the morning," returned Mr. Porter, as he took the package Dave gave him and disappeared into the library, turning on the electric light as he did so.

The boys went upstairs and started to undress. Phil had been asleep, but roused up at their entrance. The boys occupied a large chamber, with two double beds in it, for they loved to be together, as at school.

"Listen to that!" cried Dave, as he was unlacing a shoe.

"It's the telephone downstairs!" cried Phil. "My, but it's ringing to beat the band!" he added, as the bell continued to sound its call.

The boys heard Mr. Porter leave the library and go to the telephone, which was on a table in an alcove. He took down the receiver.

"Yes! yes!" the boys heard him say. Then followed a pause. "You don't mean it! When,

just now? Was that the noise we heard? Where did they go to? Wait, I'll call Mr. Wadsworth. What's that? Hurry!" Then followed another pause. "Cut off!" they heard Mr. Porter mutter.

"Something is wrong!" murmured Dave.

Mr. Porter came bounding up the stairs two steps at a time. Dave and the other boys met him in the hallway.

"What is it, Dad?" asked the son.

"Robbers—at the jewelry works!" panted David Porter. "I must notify Mr. Wadsworth!" And he ran to a near-by door and pounded on it.

"What is it?" came sleepily from the rich manufacturer. He had heard nothing of the telephone call, being down deep in the covers because of the cold.

"Mr. Wadsworth, get up, get up instantly!" cried Mr. Porter. "You are wanted at the jewelry works. I just got something of a message from your watchman. Some robbers have blown open your safes and they attacked the man, but he got away long enough to telephone. But then they attacked him again, while he was talking to me! We'll have to get down there at once!"

"Roger, did you hear that?" gasped Dave. "That's the noise we heard!"

"Yes, and they attacked the watchman," responded the senator's son.

"I'm going back there," went on Dave. "The others will have to stop and dress. Maybe we can catch those rascals."

"Yes, and save the watchman, Dave!"

By this time Mr. Wadsworth had appeared, in a bath-robe, and Dunston Porter also showed himself. Dave slipped on his shoe again and fairly threw himself into his coat, and Roger also rearranged his toilet.

"Wait—I'll go with you!" cried Phil.

"Can't wait, Phil—every second is precious!" answered our hero. "You can follow with the men."

"Take the gun, or a pistol—you may need it," urged the shipowner's son, as he started to dress.

In a corner stood Dave's double-barreled shotgun loaded. He took it up. Roger looked around the room, saw a baseball bat in another corner, and took that. Then the boys ran out into the hallway, where the electric lights were now turned on full. The whole house was in a hubbub.

"We are dressed and we'll go right down to the works," said Dave. "I heard what father said, Mr. Wadsworth. We'll help Tony Wells, if we can." And before anybody could stop him, he was out of the house, with Roger at his heels.

"Be careful, Dave!" shouted his uncle after him. "Those robbers may be desperate characters."

"All right, Uncle Dunston, I'll watch out."

"If you chance to see a policeman, take him along. I'll come as soon as I can get some clothing on."

Tired though they were, the two boys ran all the distance to the jewelry works. When they got there they found everything as dark and as silent as before. They had met nobody.

"How are you going to get in?" asked Roger, as they came to a halt before the main door.

Dave tried the door, to find it locked. "Let us walk around. The thieves may be in hiding somewhere," he suggested.

They made the circuit of the works, once falling into a hole filled with snow. Nothing unusual met their eyes, and each gazed questioningly at the other.

"It can't be a joke, can it?" suggested Roger. "Nat Poole might——"

"No, I'm sure it was no joke," broke in our hero. "Wait, I'll try that little side-door. I think that is the one the watchman generally uses."

He ran to the door in question and pushed upon it. It gave way, and with caution he entered the

building. All was so dark he could see absolutely nothing.

"I guess we'll have to make a light," he said, as his chum followed him. "Wait till I see if I have some matches."

"Here are some," answered Roger. "Wait, I'll strike a light. You keep hold of that gun—and be ready to use it, if you have to!"

The senator's son struck one of the matches and held it aloft. By its faint rays the boys were able to see some distance into the workshop into which the doorway opened. Only machines and work-benches met their gaze. On a nail hung a lantern.

"We'll light this," said Dave, taking the lantern down. "You can carry it, and I'll keep the gun handy."

With lantern and gun held out before them, and with their hearts beating wildly, the two youths walked cautiously through the workshop. They had to pass through two rooms before they reached the entrance to the offices. The light cast curious shadows on the walls and the machinery, and more than once the lads fancied they saw something moving. But each alarm proved false.

"Why not call the watchman?" suggested Roger, just before entering the offices.

They raised their voices and then raised them again. But no answer came back.

"Would he telephone from the office?" asked the senator's son.

"I suppose so—although there is another 'phone in the shipping-room."

The boys had now entered one of the new offices. Just beyond was the old office, with the two old safes, standing side by side.

"Look!" cried Roger, in dismay.

There was no need to utter the cry, for Dave was himself staring at the scene before him. The old office was in dire confusion, chairs and desks being cast in various directions. All of the windows were broken out and through these the chill night air was entering.

But what interested the boys most of all was the appearance of the two old safes. The door to each had been blown asunder and lay in a twisted mass on the floor. On top of the doors lay a number of boxes and drawers that belonged in the safes. Mingling with the wreckage were pieces of gold and silver plate, and also gold and silver knives, forks, and spoons.

"Here is where that explosion came from," said Dave. "What a pity it didn't happen when we were in front of the works! We might have caught the rascals red-handed!"

"Listen! I hear somebody now!" exclaimed Roger. "Maybe they are coming back."

"No, that is my father who is calling!" replied our hero. "I'll let him in."

He ran to the office door, and finding a key in the lock, opened it. Roger swung the lantern, and soon Dave's father and his uncle came up, followed by Mr. Wadsworth, who, being somewhat portly, could not run so fast, and had to be assisted by Phil.

"What have they done?" gasped the manufacturer. "Tell me quickly! Did they blow open the safes?" He was so agitated that he could scarcely speak.

The boys did not reply, for there was no need. Mr. Wadsworth gave one look and then sank down on a desk, too overcome to make another move.

"Did you see anything of the robbers, Dave?" asked his father.

"Not a thing."

"And where is the watchman?"

"I don't know."

"Strange, he must be somewhere around. He told me of the robbery and then he said that they were coming after him. Then the message was suddenly cut off."

"It looks like foul play to me," said Dunston

Porter, seriously. "We had better light up and investigate thoroughly."

He walked to a switchboard on the wall and began to experiment. Presently the electric lights in the offices flashed up and then some of those in the workshops were turned on.

By this time Oliver Wadsworth was in front of one of the shattered safes. An inner door, somewhat bent, was swung shut. With trembling fingers the manufacturer pulled the door open and felt into the compartment beyond.

"Gone! gone!" the others heard him mutter hoarsely. "Gone!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Porter.

"The casket—the Carwith casket is gone!" And Mr. Wadsworth looked ready to faint as he spoke.

"Were the jewels in it?" questioned Mr. Porter.

"Yes! yes!"

"All of them?" queried Dave.

"Yes, every one. I placed them in the casket myself before we locked up for the day."

"Maybe the casket is on the floor, under the doors," suggested Dave; but he had little hope of such being the case.

All started a search, lasting for several minutes. But it was useless, the casket with its precious jewelry had disappeared. Oliver Wadsworth

tottered to a chair that Phil placed for him and sank heavily upon it.

"Gone!" he muttered, in a strained voice. "Gone! And if I cannot recover it, I shall be ruined!"

CHAPTER XI

LOOKING FOR THE ROBBERS

All in the offices listened with interest to Oliver Wadsworth's words.

"The jewels were probably what the rascals were after," was Mr. Porter's comment. "Evidently they did not touch any of the gold plate or silverware."

"That shows they must have known the jewels were here," said Dunston Porter.

"Couldn't they find out about them from the workmen?" questioned Dave.

"I suppose so—although it is a rule of the works for the men to keep silent regarding precious stones. No one but myself and the general manager are supposed to know just what we have on hand."

"We must get busy and see if we cannot follow the robbers!" cried David Porter. "No use in wasting time here now. Let us scatter in all directions. One can go to the railroad station and the others to the roads leading out of town. We may pick up some clew."

"The police, we'll have to notify them!" said Roger.

"Yes! yes! Call the police up on the telephone!" ejaculated Mr. Wadsworth, starting to his feet.

Dave ran to the end of the office, where a telephone rested on a stand. The shock of the explosion had severed the wires.

"It's out of commission," he said. "I'll have to use the one in the shipping-room."

He left the offices, and made his way through two of the workrooms. Phil went with him and so did Roger.

"This will be a terrible blow for Mr. Wadsworth," was the comment of the shipowner's son.

"He said if he didn't get the jewels back it would ruin him," added Roger.

"Oh, we must get them back!" cried Dave. "Why, they are worth a fortune!"

In the shipping-room all was dark, and the boys had to first light a match and then turn on the electric illumination. The telephone was near by.

"Ruined!" cried our hero, as he beheld the wrenched-away receiver and transmitter.

"Here is where they must have caught the watchman while he was telephoning to Mr. Wadsworth!" said Phil.

"That must be it, Phil. We'll have to go to the police station, or find another telephone."

The boys rushed back to the offices and told of what they had discovered. Then Phil and Roger volunteered to run to the police station, over a quarter of a mile away.

"If you'll do that, I'll go to the railroad station," said Dave. "I may be able to pick up some clew. The twelve-fifteen train is almost due and those rascals may try to board it. If I see anybody that looks suspicious, I'll have him detained."

"Don't get into trouble!" called his father after him.

"I'll try to take care of myself, Dad," he answered.

Dave ran the whole distance to the depot. As he went along he kept his eyes wide open for a possible appearance of the robbers, peering down side-streets and alleyways, and into vacant lots. But he saw nobody until close to the station and then he received a sudden hail from in front of a coal office.

"Hi, you! Where are you going in such a hurry?" And a man in a dark blue uniform stepped into view, night-stick in hand.

"Just the man I want to see!" cried our hero. "I guess you know me, Mr. Anderson. Come

on down to the depot, quick! We must get there before the train comes in!"

"Why, it's Dave Porter!" exclaimed the policeman. "What's the row, Dave?"

"Mr. Wadsworth's jewelry works has been robbed. They have just gone to notify headquarters. I thought maybe the robbers might try to get away on the train. We want to stop any suspicious characters."

"The jewelry works robbed? You don't say! All right, I'll go right along. Hope we can catch 'em!" And Officer Anderson swung up beside Dave, and both continued on a dog-trot to the depot.

Nobody but the station master was in sight. Dave and the policeman thought it best to keep out of sight.

"You stay at one end and I'll stay at the other," said the officer. "If you see anybody suspicious, whistle twice and I'll come on the double-quick."

At last they heard the train coming. Nobody had appeared, but presently Dave caught sight of a burly figure sneaking beside several empty freight cars on a side-track. He gave the signal for aid and then sneaked after the man. By this time the train had rolled into the little station.

Only a well-known young man of Crumville alighted, accompanied by an elderly lady, his mother. There were no passengers to get aboard,

and the conductor swung his lantern for the engineer to go ahead again.

At that moment the burly fellow near the freight cars made a dive for the trucks of a baggage car, with the evident intention of stealing a ride. He had almost reached the trucks when Dave came up behind him and hauled him back.

"Not so fast!" said our hero, firmly. "I want to talk to you."

"Hey, you let me alone!" growled the burly fellow. He was ragged and unshaven and evidently a tramp.

"Where did you come from?" went on Dave, and he continued to hold the man, while the train moved off.

"Wot business is that o' yours?" was the sulky return. "Wot did yer make me miss that train for?"

"You'll find out in a minute or two," answered our hero, and just then Officer Anderson came running up.

"Got somebody, have you?" he panted.

"I guess he is only a tramp," was Dave's reply. "But we may as well hold him and see what he has got to say."

"It's Applejack Joe," said the policeman, as he eyed the prisoner. "We warned him out of town this morning. What was he going to do, steal a ride?"

"I think so. I caught him making for the trucks of a baggage car."

"That's Joe's favorite way of riding," chuckled the policeman.

"I can't see why that young feller had to stop me," growled the tramp. "You folks wants me to git out, an' when I start yer hold me back."

"Why didn't you go this morning, if you were told to go?" asked Dave.

"Say, I don't move as swift as some folks. Wot's the use? Take yer time, is my motter."

"Where have you been for the last three or four hours?" asked the policeman.

"Where have I been? It won't do you no good to know, cap'n."

"Well, you tell us, just the same," said Dave. "I want to know if you have seen any other men sneaking around town to-night. If you have, it may pay you to tell me about it."

"Provided we can land on those other chaps," put in the officer.

"Oh, I see; somethin' wrong, hey?" And the tramp leered unpleasantly. "Want to pull me into it, mebbe."

"You are pulled in already," answered Officer Anderson.

"Oh, don't arrest me, an' I'll tell you everything I know!" pleaded Applejack Joe. He had once been in the Crumville jail in winter and found

it very cold and uninviting, and he wanted no more of it.

"What do you know?" questioned Dave. "Answer quick. There has been a big robbery here, and if you can help us to catch the men maybe you'll get a reward."

"Reward? Say, I'm your huckleberry, young man. Wot do I know?" The tramp rubbed his unshaven chin. "Yes, that's them, I'm sure of it," he murmured, half to himself.

"Who?" demanded Dave, impatiently.

"Them two fellers I see down at Casterbury's stock-farm this afternoon. They had a bag wot looked suspicious to me, an', say; did they use dynamite, or somethin' like that?"

"They did!"

"Then that's them! Cos why? Cos when they walked past where I was hidin', I heard one of 'em say, 'Be careful o' that, we don't want it to go off an' git blowed up.'"

"Two men?" came from the policeman. "Did you know them?"

The tramp shook his head.

"Never set eyes on 'em before. But I see 'em after that, down back of that jewelry works over there," and he threw up his hand in the direction of Mr. Wadsworth's place. "Say, is that the place they robbed?" he continued, with some show of interest.

"Yes," answered Dave. "Now tell me how those fellows looked."

"I can't tell yer that, exactly, fer my eyesight ain't none too good, I git so much smoke an' cinders in 'em from the railroad. But they was kinder young fellers, I think, and putty good educated—not common fellers like me. Somethin' like yerself. An' they was dressed putty good, long overcoats, and soft hats wot was pulled down over their faces."

"Did you hear them speak any names?" asked Officer Anderson.

"Nary a name."

"Have you seen the two men during the last hour or so?" asked Dave.

"No, ain't see 'em since I spotted 'em back of the jewelry factory. That was about seven, or maybe eight o'clock."

"Did they go into the works then?"

"No, they just stood by the back fence talkin'. I thought they had somethin' to do with that new buildin' going up there, so I didn't think nuthin' more about it."

"I see. Well, Joe, I guess you had better come with us for the present," went on Dave. "We'll want your testimony."

"It ain't fair to arrest me!" whined the tramp.

"We won't call it arrest," went on Dave, before the policeman could speak. "You'll be de-

tained, that's all, and I'll see that you don't lose anything by it."

"All right then, if that's the way you're goin' to put it," answered Applejack Joe resignedly. "But I hope you'll see to it that I gits something to eat an' a warm place to sleep."

"I'll remember," returned our hero.

There seemed nothing now to do but to return to the jewelry works and this Dave did, taking the tramp and the officer with him. When they arrived they found the chief of police there, with two officers. The chief was questioning Mr. Wadsworth and the distracted manufacturer was telling what he knew about the crime that had been committed.

The arrival of those from the depot, and what the tramp had to tell, put a new face on the matter. One of the officers said he had seen the two strangers with the tool-bag, but had put them down for traveling salesmen visiting Crumville on business.

"They are undoubtedly the guilty parties," said the chief. "The only question is: Where did they go to?"

"Well, they didn't take that twelve-fifteen train," answered Dave.

"Then they either got out of town by the use of a horse or an auto, or else they are here yet," said Mr. Wadsworth. "Oh, catch them! Catch

them if you can! I must get those jewels back! I'll give a big reward for their safe return."

"Have you heard from Phil or Roger yet?"

"No, Dave."

"They may bring in some word."

"Let us hope so," groaned the manufacturer.

"What became of the watchman?"

"That is a mystery. Perhaps they carried him off and threw him into the river, or something like that!"

"Oh, they wouldn't be as rascally as all that!" returned Dave, in horror.

"Perhaps. Some robbers are very desperate characters."

At that moment came a cry from one of the workrooms, where one of the officers had gone to take a look around.

"What is it, Carr?" called the chief of police.

"Here's poor Tony Wells," was the answer. "He's in bad shape. Better somebody run for a doctor at once!"

CHAPTER XII

THE TELLTALE CIGARETTE BOX

THE watchman was indeed in bad shape. He had been found thrown under a workbench, and just returning to consciousness. He had a cut over his left ear and another on his forehead, from which the blood had flowed freely.

"Must have struck him with a club, or an iron bar," was the opinion of the chief, as the injured man was carried into the office and placed on some chair cushions. Here his wounds were washed and bound up, while one officer ran to get a doctor who lived not a great distance off.

It was some little time before Tony Wells, who was nearly seventy years of age, opened his eyes to stare around him.

"Don't—don't hit me again!" he murmured. "I—I didn't touch you!"

"It's all right, Tony!" said the chief. "Those fellows are gone. You're among friends."

"They—knocked me down!" gasped the old watchman. "I—I—tried to telephone—after the explosion, but—but——" He could not go on, and suddenly relapsed again into unconsciousness.

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Wadsworth, tenderly. "We must do what we can for him."

"Is anything missing besides the jewels?" asked Dave, while they were waiting for the doctor to come, and waiting to hear from the others who had gone out.

"No, Dave. But that is enough. If they are not recovered, I shall be ruined."

"Can they hold you responsible for the loss?"

"Yes, for when I took the jewels to re-set I guaranteed the safe return of each jewel. I had to do that because they were afraid some workmen might try to substitute other jewels not so good—which is sometimes done."

"And you said they were worth seventy-five thousand dollars?"

"All of that."

"Those robbers certainly made a haul."

"It drives me crazy to think about it," groaned Oliver Wadsworth.

"Perhaps the others who went out will catch them," answered our hero, hopefully.

Soon the doctor arrived and took charge of old Tony Wells, whom he knew well. As Wells was a widower, living alone, the doctor said he would take the old man to his own home, where he could have constant attention.

"He is already in a fever," said the physician. "We had better not try to question him at pres-

ent. It will only excite him the more." And a little later the sufferer was placed on a litter and carried to the doctor's residence.

By this time the news was circulating that the Wadsworth jewelry works had been robbed, and many persons spent the rest of the night looking for the two young men who were supposed to be guilty of the crime. Oliver Wadsworth and an officer remained at the offices, guarding the wrecked place and looking for clews of the evil-doers. But nothing in the way of evidence against the robbers was brought to light, excepting that they had used several drills and some dynamite on the two old safes, probably blowing them up simultaneously. They had taken the tool-bag with its contents with them and also another small valise, belonging to one of Mr. Wadsworth's traveling salesmen.

"I can't understand why Tony Wells didn't discover them when they first came in," said Dave.

"Maybe he did and they made him a prisoner," suggested Mr. Wadsworth. "Tony was very faithful—the best watchman I ever had."

Daylight came at last and still the search for the two robbers was kept up. In the meantime, telegrams and telephone messages had been sent in all directions. To stimulate the searchers Mr. Wadsworth offered a reward of one thousand dol-

lars for the recovery of the jewels and this reward was later on increased to five thousand dollars.

When Tony Wells was well enough to tell his story he said he had been going the rounds of the works when he suddenly found himself confronted by two masked men. He had started to cry out and run for help when the men had seized him and thrown him down and bound him fast to a work-bench. Then the men had gone to the offices, and later on had come the explosion. He knew they were blowing open the safes and did what he could to free himself. At last he managed to get free, but found himself too weak to run for help. He had dragged himself to the telephone in the shipping-room and was sending his message to Mr. Wadsworth when the masked men had again appeared and knocked him down. That was all he remembered until the time he was found, as already described.

"You did not see the faces of the two men?" asked Oliver Wadsworth.

"No, sir, they were all covered with black masks. But I think the fellows was rather young-like," answered the old watchman. "Both of 'em was about the size of Dave Porter,—but neither of 'em was Dave,—I know that by the voices," he went on, hastily.

"No, Dave was at home with me," said Oliver

Wadsworth. "But he and one of his friends passed the works just before the explosion."

The news of the robbery had upset the Wadsworth household completely. Mrs. Wadsworth was as much distressed as her husband, and Jessie was as pale as if seriously ill.

"Oh, Dave, supposing the jewels are not recovered!" said Jessie, when they met in the hallway. "It will ruin father,—I heard him tell mamma so!"

"We are going to get them back—we've simply got to do it," Dave replied.

"But how? Nobody seems to know what has become of the robbers."

"Oh, just wait, Jessie. We are sure to get some trace of them sooner or later."

"What makes you so hopeful, Dave?" and now the girl suddenly clutched his arm. "Have you a clew?"

"I think so, but I am not sure. I am going to talk to your father about it, and then I am going to take another look around Crumville and around the offices."

Dave's father and his Uncle Dunston had been out all day, and so had Phil and Roger and Ben, and a score of others, including the officers of the law. But nothing had been seen or heard of the mysterious men with the tool-bag. Another tramp

had been rounded up, but he knew absolutely nothing of the crime and was let go again.

Oliver Wadsworth's face was white and drawn and he looked as if he had suddenly grown five years older. He had a long, private conversation with Dave's father and Dunston Porter, and all three men looked very grave when the conference came to an end.

There was good cause for this seriousness. The new addition to the jewelry works had placed Mr. Wadsworth in debt. The Porters had lent him twenty thousand dollars, and, just then, could lend him no more, having a number of obligations of their own to meet.

The Carwith jewels were the property of Mr. and Mrs. Ridgeway Osgood Carwith, of Fifth Avenue, New York City. The Carwiths were now on a trip around the world, but were expected home some time in the spring. Mr. Wadsworth had agreed to re-set the jewels according to designs already accepted by the millionaire and his wife, and had guaranteed the safe return of the jewels, re-set as specified, not later than the first of the following May. As the millionaire was a strict business man he had demanded a bond for the safe return of his property, and this bond had been given by Mr. Wadsworth, indorsed by David Breslow Porter and Dunston Porter.

Thus it will readily be seen that the millionaire and his wife were amply secured. If they did not get the jewels back they would demand the payment of the bond, worth seventy-five thousand dollars, and Mr. Wadsworth and the Porters would have to make good.

On the second day after the robbery, Dave, Roger, and Phil went down to the jewelry works and began a close investigation on their own account. Dave had mentioned something to his chums that had caused them to open their eyes in astonishment.

An hour was spent around the offices, and then Phil picked up an empty cigarette case. He took it to Dave and Roger and both looked at it with keen interest.

"I guess that is another clew," said our hero. "Let us look around some more."

"I'm going for the train now," said the senator's son, a little later. "And as soon as I find Hooker Montgomery I'll let you know."

"Yes, and make him come here, whether he wants to or not," cried Dave.

"You leave that to me," answered Roger, grimly.

Oliver Wadsworth had been interviewing a private detective, and soon the man left, stating he thought he could lay his hands on the guilty parties.

"I'll look for Tom Basnett," said the detective. "This looks like one of his jobs."

"I don't care whose job it is—I want the jewels back," said Mr. Wadsworth, wearily. He had not slept since the crime had been committed.

"Mr. Wadsworth, Phil and I would like to talk to you in private," said Dave, when he could get the chance.

"You have some clew, Dave?"

"Well, I want to tell you something, and then you can judge for yourself."

"Very well, come with me," answered the manufacturer, and led the way to a little side-room, used by the salesmen for exhibiting wares to possible customers.

"I want to tell you all about something that happened early in the winter, while I was at Oak Hall," said Dave. And then he told of how he had called on the fake doctor, Hooker Montgomery, and how he had been attacked from behind and made a prisoner, and carried off to a house in the woods, the particulars of which have already been set down in "Dave Porter and His Rivals."

"The fellows who carried me off were the doctor and the driver, who was only a tool, and two fellows who have caused me a lot of trouble in the past, Nick Jasniff and Link Merwell," went on our hero. "When I got away I tried to

follow up Jasniff and Merwell, but they got away from me, and so did the driver get away. But one day I found Hooker Montgomery, and by threatening to have him arrested I made him confess to the truth, which was that Jasniff and Merwell had hired him to help get me in their power. At first they told Montgomery it was only a schoolboy trick, and he said he believed them, but, later on, it leaked out that Jasniff and Merwell had another motive in making me a prisoner."

"And that motive——?" began Oliver Wadsworth, with deep interest.

"Doctor Montgomery said that Jasniff and Merwell had in mind to drug me and take me to some place a good distance from Oak Hall. He said he also heard them speak of robbing a jewelry works, and I was to be drugged and left in the factory,—to make it appear as if I had done the deed and as if the blowing up of a safe had stunned me."

"Dave, is this possible!" exclaimed the manufacturer.

"It is true, Mr. Wadsworth," said Phil. "I was along and so was Roger at the time. Montgomery couldn't give many details, but he said he thought Jasniff and Merwell were cold-blooded villains and he wanted nothing more to do with them."

"This looks as if those rascals, Jasniff and Merwell, had come here."

"I believe they did come," went on Dave. "And here is one clew we have already picked up against them." And he held up the empty cigarette box.

"What is that? Only a cigarette box. How can that be a clew?"

"I will tell you. Both Jasniff and Merwell are inveterate cigarette smokers. I have seen them smoking many times. They smoke a Turkish brand of cigarettes, having a peculiar blue and gold band around the box. This is the same kind of a box, and I am convinced that this box was emptied and thrown away in your offices by Jasniff or Merwell."

CHAPTER XIII

DARK DAYS

OLIVER WADSWORTH listened to Dave's words with deep interest. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"That sounds pretty good, Dave, were it not for one thing. Do you imagine that two masked fellows, bent on blowing open safes, would stop to light and smoke cigarettes?"

"I think Merwell and Jasniff would, Merwell especially. When Link is nervous the first thing he does is to take out a cigarette and light it. It's an almost unconscious habit with him."

"This story about what that doctor said interests me most of all," went on the manufacturer. "I think we ought to have a talk with him. For all we know, he may be one of the guilty parties."

"No, I don't think he is that kind. Besides, he was very angry at Merwell and Jasniff and wanted nothing more to do with them."

"The detective who was here thought he had a clew against a professional bank burglar. Personally, I think this looks more like the work of professionals than fellows just out of school," said

the manufacturer; and there, for the time being, the matter rested.

During the day two more detectives appeared and went over the ground, as the other officials had done. One thought he saw in the robbery the hand of a criminal known as Red Andrews.

"This is just the way Red Andrews would go at a job," said the detective. "He was sent up for robbing a private banker some years ago, and he got out two months ago. He was in New York —I saw him on Fifth Avenue, not far from the Carwith mansion. He may have heard about the jewels there. I am going to look for him." And he departed on a hunt for Red Andrews.

It was not until two days later that Roger came back to Crumville. His face showed his disappointment.

"Such mean luck!" he exclaimed, when he met Dave, Phil, and Ben. "I went to four towns, looking for Hooker Montgomery, and at last I found out that he had left the east several days ago."

"Where did he go to?" questioned our hero.

"The folks I met couldn't tell exactly, but they thought to visit a rich aunt in the far west."

This was a great disappointment, for they had hoped to learn much more concerning the plans of Jasniff and Merwell, from the fake doctor.

"We might send him a letter, to his last residence. Maybe the post-office authorities will forward it," suggested Phil.

"I did that," answered the senator's son. "I told him that I wanted to hear from him at once, and that it would be money in his pocket to write or to telegraph to me. I didn't mention your name, Dave, for I thought he might hear of this robbery and get suspicious."

It was ideal weather for skating and sleighing, but none of the young folks at the Wadsworth mansion felt like going out for fun. All could see that the older folks were much worried, and consequently, they were worried, too.

"Oh, Dave, what if those jewels are never recovered?" said Laura to her brother, when they were alone. "It will just about ruin Mr. Wadsworth, Uncle Dunston says."

"Let us hope for the best, Laura."

"I heard you and the other boys talking about Nick Jasniff and Link Merwell."

"Yes?"

"Do you really imagine they had something to do with it?"

"Yes, I think so, and so do Phil, Ben, and Roger. But the detectives and Mr. Wadsworth think the work was done by professionals. They don't think that fellows like Nick and Link would be equal to the job."

"But if you think Merwell and Jasniff guilty, why don't you go after them and find out?"

"We don't know where they are."

"Aren't they with their folks?'

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. The Jasniffs are traveling aboard and Mr. Merwell is in Philadelphia. We sent to Mr. Merwell—through an outsider—and learned that he didn't know where Link was just now, said he had written that he was going on a tour south for the winter. My private opinion is that Mr. Merwell finds Link hard to manage and is glad to get rid of him."

"Do you suppose he did go south?"

"He might—after this affair here."

"They didn't say what part of the south he went to?"

"They said Florida. But Florida is pretty big, you know," and Dave smiled faintly.

"Jessie is awfully downcast over this, and so is Mrs. Wadsworth—in fact, we all are."

"I know it, Laura." Dave drew a long breath. "It's awfully hard to sit still and do nothing. I imagine Mr. Wadsworth can't sleep for thinking of the affair."

"I heard Mrs. Wadsworth talking last night to him. I didn't mean to listen, Dave, but before I could get away I heard her say that if it was

necessary she would give up this house to live in and move to a smaller place! Think of it! Why, her very heart is set on this house and these fine grounds! And Jessie thinks the world of them, too!"

"It would be awfully hard if they did have to give them up, Laura."

"Dave, can't father or Uncle Dunston help them, if they need help?"

"They have helped Mr. Wadsworth already—loaned him twenty thousand dollars so that he could put that new addition to the works. They also indorsed his note covering the safe return of the jewels. If those jewels aren't gotten back, and Mr. Wadsworth can't make good on that note, father and Uncle Dunston will have to pay the money."

"All of it?"

"As much as Mr. Wadsworth can't pay. And the worst of the whole matter is, Laura, just at present father and Uncle Dunston have their ready money tied up in such a manner that they can't get hold of it excepting at a great loss. Oh, it certainly is a terrible state of affairs!" And Dave shook his head, gravely.

During that week Ben had Shadow Hamilton and Buster Beggs visit him. Of course, the new arrivals had to hear all about the robbery,

and they came over with Ben to call on the other boys, and on the girls.

"This is fierce!" was Buster's comment. "And Ben says you rather suspect Merwell and Jasniff," he added, in a whisper.

"We do, but don't say anything to any outsiders about it," answered Dave.

"Say, that puts me in mind of a story," said Shadow. "A little girl once——"

"Wow! Cut it out, Shadow!" burst out Phil.

"Stories don't go with robberies," supplemented Roger.

"Let him tell it," put in Dave, with a faint smile. "It will relieve his mind, and I guess I need a little fun to brace me up—I've been so depressed lately."

"This isn't so very much of a story," went on Shadow, as all looked at him. "Dave telling Buster not to let outsiders know put me in mind of it. Once the mother of a little girl told her that her uncle had been naughty and had been put in prison for it. Said the mother, 'Now, Lucy, don't tell anybody.' So Lucy went out to play and pretty soon, when she had all her companions around her she said, 'What do you think my ma said? She said that when anybody has an uncle in prison, like my uncle is, you mustn't tell

anybody. So I'm not going to tell a single person!'"

"Well, I guess the boys know what I mean," said Dave, after a short laugh. "I want you to keep this to yourselves. Don't spread it any further. It may be that I am mistaken, and if so, and Merwell and Jasniff heard of what I have said, they would come down on me like a ton of bricks—and I'd not blame them."

In the afternoon, urged by Mrs. Wadsworth, the boys went skating, taking the girls with them. On the ice they met Nat Poole, but the money-lender's son did not speak to them, indeed he did his best to keep out of their way.

"He hasn't forgotten New Year's Eve," said Ben. "He had better keep his distance, unless he wants to get into more trouble."

"Wonder what he thinks of the robbery?" mused Dave.

"We might get Buster to pump him," suggested Phil. "He is on pretty good terms with Nat,—that is, they are not open enemies."

Buster was appealed to and he readily agreed to do the "pumping," provided the money-lender's son had anything to say. He skated off by himself and then threw himself in Nat's way, and was gone the best part of half an hour.

"Well, did you learn anything?" queried Roger, when the stout youth returned.

"I guess I did!" cried Buster. "Say, I think Nat Poole is about as mean as they make 'em!" he burst out. "And he hasn't a grain of good, hard common-sense!"

"What did he say?" demanded Phil.

"Oh, he said a lot of things, about the robbery, and about the Wadsworths and the Porters. First he said he didn't believe the jewels were nearly as valuable as Mr. Wadsworth represented them to be, and the manufacturer was kicking up a big fuss just as a sort of advertisement. Then he said there was a report that Dave had been seen in front of the works just a few minutes before the explosion, and that that looked mighty suspicious to him."

"The mean fellow!" muttered Roger.

"I told him that you and Roger were going to the Wadsworth house at the time, and were home when the watchman telephoned, but he only tossed his head as if he didn't believe a word of it, and said he guessed Dave could tell something if he was of a mind to talk."

"If that isn't Poole to a T!" cried Phil.

"If I were you, Dave, I'd punch his head for him," was Shadow's advice.

"That wouldn't do any good," said Ben. "You can't stop Nat from talking any more than you can stop water from running out of a sieve."

"Which puts me in mind of another story," burst out Shadow, eagerly. "Once two men——"

"Oh, Shadow, another?" cried Buster, reproachfully.

"I know that story—it's moss-covered with age," announced Roger.

"What is it?" demanded the story-teller of Oak Hall.

"Two men—bet—carry water in a sieve—bet taken—water frozen. Ha! ha! Shadow, I got you that time."

"Well, it's a good story anyway," answered Shadow, ruefully.

"I shan't attempt to stop Nat unless he makes some direct accusation," said Dave, calmly. "What would be the use? It would only make matters worse."

"If you took notice of what he says, some folks would begin to think there was something in it," said Phil. "Yes, better drop Nat. He isn't worth bothering about, anyway. Just the same, it is mean for him to speak in this fashion."

"He wouldn't be Nat Poole if he didn't," retorted Roger.

Despite this incident, the boys and girls managed to have a good time on the ice, and for an hour or two Dave forgot his troubles and those of his friends.

"What are you going to do for the rest of the

vacation, Dave?" said Roger, that evening. "You know you promised to come to my home."

"Yes, and you promised to visit me, too," added Phil. "You haven't been to our house in a long time."

"To tell the truth, I haven't the heart to go anywhere," answered Dave, soberly. "I guess I had better stay here and see if something doesn't turn up."

"Well, I can't blame you," said the senator's son, and Phil said the same.

CHAPTER XIV

OFF FOR THE SOUTH

Two days later, when Roger was packing up, getting ready to return home, he received a letter from Luke Watson that filled him with interest. Luke had gone to St. Augustine, Florida, to join his folks, who were spending the winter there.

"Here's news!" burst out the senator's son, as he came rushing to Dave and Phil with the epistle. "This letter is from Luke Watson, you know his folks are in Florida. Well, on his way to St. Augustine, Luke stopped for a day at Jacksonville. Listen to what he says:

"'I was walking down one of the main streets of Jacksonville, looking into the shop windows, when what do you think? I saw Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff. You could have knocked me over with a feather, for I hadn't imagined that they were anywhere near. They were nattily dressed and each carried a small valise, and they were buying caps and some other things for a sea voyage. I went into the shop and called to them, and my! both of them jumped as if they were shot,

and Merwell got so pale I thought he was going to faint. I said "Hello," but they didn't answer to that, and Jasniff at once wanted to know if I was alone. When I told him I was he seemed mightily relieved, and Merwell looked relieved, too. They wanted to know what I was doing there and I told them. Then I asked what they were doing, but I couldn't get any straight answer. Merwell started to say something about going to sea, but Jasniff stopped him short, and said they guessed they would go back to New York, where they had come from.

"'It was awful funny—they positively looked scared to death, and while they were talking to me they looked over my shoulders, as if on their guard against somebody. I asked them what they had been doing since they left Rockville, and they said not much of anything, just traveling around. They seemed to have plenty of money, for just as I went into the shop I saw Merwell pay for something from a big roll of greenbacks.

"'After I left them, I got a bit curious about the pair, and so I watched them come from the shop and walk down to one of the docks and go aboard a big four-masted schooner. I hung around a little and pretty soon they came from the schooner and went up to one of the big hotels, and there I lost sight of them. Each had his little valise with him, but they weren't big enough for

much clothing. My, but they were scared! I fancy they thought I might pitch into them for the mean things they did in the past. But I didn't want to start any row.' "

"Is that all he says?" demanded Dave, after the senator's son had finished.

"That's all he says about Merwell and Jasniff and their doings."

"Doesn't he mention the name of that schooner, or the hotel?" asked Phil.

"No."

"Did you say Luke was going to Jacksonville?" asked our hero.

"Yes, his whole family are down there."

"Then I could telegraph to him and he could give me the name of the hotel, and of the schooner."

"Dave, what do you make out of this?" demanded the senator's son.

"I make out of it that Merwell and Jasniff are guilty!" burst out Dave. "They went from here to Florida, and now they have either gone to sea, or are going, as soon as that schooner sails. Do you notice what Luke says about their being scared almost to death when they saw him? They evidently thought some of us, or the officers of the law, were with him."

"And the little valises!" burst out the ship-

owner's son. "Perhaps they contain the jewels!"

"Would they be foolish enough to carry them around like that?" questioned Roger. "Wouldn't they hide them?"

"They may be looking for some good hiding-place, or some place where they can sell them," answered Dave. "Remember, Jasniff and Merwell are green at this business—they wouldn't go at it like professionals. If they were professionals, they wouldn't have acted so scared."

"That is true. What will you do, tell Mr. Wadsworth of this?"

"I think I'll tell my father and my Uncle Dunston first. Mr. Wadsworth doesn't place much credit in the story of Merwell and Jasniff's guilt. He thinks the detectives are on the right track."

"Well, possibly they are," admitted Phil. "But I must say, this looks mighty suspicious to me."

"I have half a mind to take matters in my own hands and run down to Jacksonville," went on our hero. "Who knows but what I might find Merwell and Jasniff? If I did, I could stop them and make them give an account of themselves by making that old charge of abduction against them, and that charge of having used my name."

"Say, that's an idea!" cried Roger. "And say, I'd like to go with you."

"So would I," added Phil. "We might go down in one of my father's ships."

"Too slow, Phil—the limited express for this trip," answered Dave. "But I must talk it over with dad first," he added.

"We have got over three weeks before school opens again," pursued the senator's son. "We could go down to Florida and back easily in that time."

Dave's father had gone to New York on business, but came home that evening. In the meantime a telegram was sent to Luke Watson, asking for the name of the hotel, at which Merwell and Jasniff had stopped, and of the schooner.

Dave's father and his uncle listened closely to what he had to tell, and to the reading of the letter from Luke Watson. They talked the affair over for an hour with the boys.

"You may be right, boys," said Mr. Porter, at last. "And it may be a good plan to follow those rascals up. But I don't think I would bother Mr. Wadsworth about it. He received a telegram from one of the detectives, and the officer is more sure than ever that he is on the right track. He caught Red Andrews pawning a fair-sized diamond, and he thinks the gem is from the Carwith collection."

"Can't he make Red Andrews confess?" asked Dave.

"Unfortunately the rascal got away when on the way to the police-station. But the detective feels he can soon round him up again."

Dave looked thoughtfully out of the window and tapped the table with his fingers.

"You still think Merwell and Jasniff guilty?" remarked his uncle, with a smile.

"Yes, Uncle Dunston. After what Hooker Montgomery said, I'll think them guilty until somebody proves otherwise."

"Then I tell you what I'll do, boys," said Dunston Porter. "I'll take a trip down to Florida with you and look into this matter. I'd rather be on the move than sitting still waiting for something to turn up."

"Will you go?" cried Dave, eagerly.

"I will."

"When?"

"As soon as you wish, and we can get train accommodations."

"Hadn't we better wait until we hear from Luke?" suggested Roger.

"No, let us get off at once!" exclaimed Dave. "If he sends word after we are gone, it can be forwarded to us." And so it was arranged.

Great was the surprise of the Wadsworths and of Laura when the boys and Dunston Porter an-

nounced that they were going to start for Florida the next morning.

"Why, Dave?" asked Jessie. "Why are you going in such a hurry?"

"Oh, I hardly care to tell, Jessie," he answered. "It may prove only a wild goose chase."

"It is about the missing jewels?"

"Yes."

"Then you are after Merwell and Jasniff."

"Yes, but please don't tell any outsiders."

"Oh, Dave, don't get into any trouble!" cried the girl, as she clung to him. "They are such bad fellows! You know what they have done to you in the past!"

"I am not afraid of them."

"Oh, I know how brave you are, Dave! But—but don't let them harm you—for my sake, please!" And then the tears came into her eyes and she hid her face on his arm.

"There! there! don't worry!" he said, as he bent over her, and then he kissed her forehead. "We'll be back before long," and he gave her a little hug. Then the others came in.

Laura was also worried, but glad that her uncle would be along. She helped Dave to pack his suit-case. Phil and Roger also packed up, and sent word home regarding the proposed trip. As my old readers know, all the boys were well-to-do, so the expenses did not bother them.

At breakfast time the following morning came a telegram from Luke Watson. It read as follows:

"The hotel was the Castor. Think schooner was the *Emma Brown,* or *Black,* or *Jones.* Common name."

"Well, that isn't very definite, but it is something to work on," remarked Dunston Porter.

Soon the party of four were ready to start. There was a general hand-shaking and also a few kisses.

"Well, have a good time, even if you don't catch those fellows," said Mrs. Wadsworth.

"Keep out of trouble," warned Laura.

"Yes, yes, don't let them harm you," pleaded timid Jessie.

"And let us hear from you often," said Mr. Porter.

"I don't know what to say about this," said Oliver Wadsworth, shaking his head, slowly. "But if you do get on the track of those jewels, leave no stone unturned to get them."

"Leave that to me, Mr. Wadsworth," said Dunston Porter. "If we find those young men have the gems—or had them—we'll get them back, never fear." And he spoke in a tone that showed he meant what he said.

They went to the depot in the family sleigh. Ben had heard of their going away and was there to see them off. Soon the train rolled in that was to carry the travelers to New York City.

"Good-by!" cried the boys, as they clambered aboard the car.

"Good-by!" called Ben. "I wish you luck." And then the girls waved their hands, and the train moved off, slowly at first and then faster and faster, until Crumville was left behind.

"It's a great trip they are taking," said Ben, to Laura and Jessie. "Wish I was going along."

"Why didn't you go?" questioned Laura.

"Oh, I've got some things to do at home," answered Ben. He did not care to add that his father did not wish to stand the extra expense. Mr. Basswood was fairly well-to-do, but thought he was spending enough on his son by sending him to boarding-school.

The sleigh was about to drive off when the station agent came running out, waving a yellow envelope.

"Is Mr. Wadsworth here?" he questioned, of Jessie.

"No, Mr. Mack, my father went to business. What is it, a telegram?"

"Yes,—something very important too."

"Then give it to me and I will take it to him at once."

"I could send it, but——"

"Never mind. Here, I will sign for it," and Jessie did so. Then the whip cracked and the horses started for the jewelry works on a gallop.

When Jessie handed the telegram to her father he opened it and read the contents eagerly. His face lit up.

"This is good news!" he cried. "Good news! I must go to Boston at once."

"Have they found the jewels?" questioned his daughter.

"The detective thinks he has located them. Yes, I must go at once." And Mr. Wadsworth hurried off to prepare for the journey.

CHAPTER XV

SOMETHING ABOUT WHITE MICE

DUNSTON PORTER and the boys were to go to New York City and there transfer to Jersey City for the train bound South. All had comfortable seats together.

"It's going to be quite a trip," said Roger, as he settled back to gaze at the swiftly-moving panorama of fields covered with snow.

"Yes, and we are going to journey from winter into summer," added Phil. "It's good we remembered that when we packed our suit-cases. At first I was going to put in nothing but heavy clothing."

"I am glad we heard from Luke," said Dave. "That gives us a little to work on. I hope the *Emma Brown,* or whatever her name may be, hasn't sailed yet."

"Won't Merwell and Jasniff be surprised if we do locate them?" said the senator's son. "I suppose they think we are at home."

The car was only half-filled with passengers, so the boys and Dunston Porter had plenty of room, and they moved around from one seat to

another. So the time passed quickly enough, until they rolled into the Grand Central Station, in New York.

"Well, little old New York looks as busy as ever," was Phil's comment, as they stepped out on the street. "Are we to transfer to Jersey City at once?"

"Yes," answered Dunston Porter. "We'll take the subway and the river tube, and get there in no time."

Riding through the tube under the Hudson River was a new experience for the lads and they rather enjoyed it. The train of steel cars rushed along at a good rate of speed, and almost before they knew it, they were in New Jersey and being hoisted up in an elevator to the train-shed.

"Coast Line Express!" was the cry at one of the numerous gates to the tracks, and thither the party hurried. Willing porters took their baggage, and a minute later they found themselves in an elegant Pullman car. Dunston Porter had telegraphed ahead for sleeping accommodations, and they had two double seats opposite each other, directly in the middle of the car.

"All aboard!" sang out the conductor, about ten minutes later, and then the long train rolled slowly from the big train-shed, and the trip to Florida could be said to have fairly begun.

"Do we go by the way of Philadelphia and

Washington?" asked Phil, who had not taken the time to study the route.

"Yes," answered Dunston Porter. "Here is a time-table. That will show you the whole route and tell you just when we get to each place."

"Will we have to make any changes?" asked Roger.

"None whatever."

Soon the train had left Jersey City behind and a little later it stopped at Newark, and then sped on towards Philadelphia. By this time it had grown too dark to see the landscape and the boys and Dunston Porter retired.

On and on through the long night rolled the train, keeping fairly close to the Atlantic sea-coast. With nothing to do, the boys did not arise until late in the morning. They found Dave's uncle in the lavatory ahead of them, indulging in the luxury of a shave with a safety razor.

"Well, how are you feeling?" asked Dunston Porter.

"Fine!" cried Dave.

"Couldn't feel better," added the senator's son.

"Ready for a big breakfast?"

"I am," answered Phil, promptly. "Gracious, but traveling makes me hungry!"

They had to wait a little before they could get seats together in the dining-car and they amused

themselves by gazing at the settlements through which they were passing. Here and there were numerous cabins, with hordes of colored children playing about.

"This is the Southland, true enough," observed Dave. "Just see how happy those pickaninnies seem to be!"

"Yes, one would almost envy their care-free dispositions," answered Dunston Porter. "Their manner shows that it doesn't take money to make one happy."

They had passed through Richmond and were now on their way to Emporia. It was growing steadily warmer, and by noon all were glad enough to leave the car and go out on the observation platform at the end of the train.

The next stop was at Fayetteville and after that came Charleston. Long before this the snow had disappeared and the fields looked as green as in the fall at home.

"We'll be at Jacksonville when you wake up in the morning," said Dunston Porter, as they turned into their berths the second night on the train.

"Good! We can't get there any too quick for me!" answered Dave.

"You mustn't expect too much, Dave. You may be bitterly disappointed," remarked his uncle, gravely.

"Oh, we've just got to catch Merwell and Jasniff, Uncle Dunston!"

"Yes, but they may not be guilty. You'll have to go slow about accusing them."

"Well, I want to catch them and question them anyway. I can have them detained on the old charge, you know—that is, if they try to get away from me."

Dave and Phil slept on one side of the car, with Dunston Porter and Roger on the other. As the steam heat was still turned on, it was uncomfortably warm, and as a consequence Dave was rather restless. He tumbled and tossed in his berth, which was the upper one, and wished that the night were over and that they were in Jacksonville.

"Oh, pshaw! I really must get some sleep!" he told himself. "If I don't, I'll be as sleepy as an owl to-morrow and not fit to hunt up those rascals. Yes, I must go to sleep," and he did what he could to settle himself.

He had just closed his eyes when a peculiar noise below him made him start up. Phil was thrashing around wildly.

"What's the matter, Phil?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Something is in my berth, some animal, or something!" answered the shipowner's son. "I can't go to sleep for it. Every time I lie down it begins to move."

"Maybe it's a rat."

"Whoever heard of a rat in a sleeping-car?" snorted Phil.

"Perhaps you were dreaming. I didn't hear anything," went on Dave.

"No, I wasn't dreaming—I heard it as plain as day."

"Better go to bed and forget it, Phil," and then Dave lay down again. The shipowner's son grumbled a little under his breath, then turned off his electric light, and sank on his pillow once more.

Dave remained quiet for several minutes and then sat bolt upright and gave a low cry. There was no mistake about it, something had moved over his feet and given him a slight nip in the toe.

"Phil!" he called, softly. "Did you do that? Come, no fooling now. This is no place for jokes."

"Do what?"

"Pinch me in the toe."

"I haven't touched your toe. How can I from the lower berth?"

"Well, something nipped me."

"Maybe it's you who are dreaming this trip, Dave," returned the shipowner's son, with pardonable sarcasm.

Dave did not reply, for just then he felt some-

thing moving in the blanket. He made a clutch for it. A little squeak followed.

"I've got it, Phil!"

"What is it?"

"I don't know yet—it's in the blanket."

"Oh, what a noise!" came from the berth beyond. "Cannot you young men be quiet?" It was a woman who was speaking. She was an elderly person and Dave had noticed, during the day, that she was rather sour-looking.

"Sorry, madam, but I've just caught something in my berth," answered Dave. "I'll turn up the light and see what it is," he added, as he held on to the object in the blanket with one hand and turned on the electric illumination with the other.

The cries and talking had awakened half a dozen people and the sleepy porter came down the aisle to find out what was wrong.

"It's a mouse—a white mouse!" cried Dave, as the little creature was uncovered.

"Wot's dat, a mouse!" exclaimed the porter. "Nebber heard of sech a t'ing! How did he git yeah?"

"Don't ask me," replied Dave. "Ugh! he nipped me in the toe, too!"

"Here's another one!" roared Phil. "Ran right across my arm! Take that, you little imp!"

he added, and bang! one of his shoes hit the woodwork of the car.

"A mouse!" shrieked the elderly woman. "Did you say a mouse, young man?"

"I did—and there is more than one, too," answered Dave, for he had felt another movement at his feet. He lost no time in scrambling up, and Phil followed.

By this time the whole sleeping-car was in an uproar. Everybody who heard the word "mouse" felt certain one of the creatures must be in his or her berth.

"Porter! porter! save me!" screamed the elderly lady. "Oh, mice, just think of it!" And wrapping her dressing-gown around her, she leaped from her berth and sped for the ladies' room. Others also got up, including Dunston Porter and Roger.

"What am I going to do with this fellow?" asked Dave, as he held the mouse up in his vest.

"Better throw it out of a window," suggested his uncle. "Mice in a sleeper! This is certainly the limit!" he muttered. "The railroad company better get a new system of cleaning."

"Mice!" screamed a young lady. "Oh, I shall die!" she shrieked, and looked ready to faint.

"Shoot 'em, why don't you?" suggested a fat

man, who came forth from his berth wearing a blanket, Indian fashion.

By this time Phil had caught one of the creatures. Both he and Dave started for the rear of the car, to throw the mice off the train.

"Stop! stop! I beg of you, don't kill those mice!" came suddenly from a tall, thin young man who had been sleeping in a berth at the end of the car. Dave had noticed him during the day and had put him down as a preacher or actor.

"Why not?" asked our hero.

"They are mine, that's why," said the man. "I would not have them killed for a thousand dollars!"

"Say, wot yo'-all talkin' about?" demanded the porter. "Dem mice yours?"

"Yes! yes! Oh, please do not kill them!" pleaded the tall, thin man. "They won't hurt anybody, really they won't."

"Say, are them white mice educated?" demanded the fat man.

"Indeed they are--I educated them myself," answered the other man. "I spent months in doing it, too. They are the best-educated white mice in the United States," he added, proudly.

CHAPTER XVI

PICKING UP THE TRAIL

THE announcement that the mice that had been caught in the car were educated filled the boys with interest, but it did not lessen their indignation nor that of the other passengers.

"The idea of mice on the train, even if they are educated!" shrilled the elderly lady.

"It's outrageous!" stormed another lady. "I never heard of such a thing in all my life!"

"Say, you must take this for a cattle train!" remarked the fat man, bluntly. "If you do, you've got another guess coming."

"Oh, my dear, sweet mice," said the tall, slim man, as he took the animal from Dave and also the one that Phil was holding. "That is King Hal and this one is President Tom! They are both highly educated. They can——"

"Say, howsoeber did yo'-all git dem trash in dis cah!" demanded the porter.

"I—er—I had them in a cage in my—er—in my suit-case," the owner of the mice answered, and now his voice faltered. "I really didn't think they would get out."

"We don't allow no mice in de sleepin'-cahs!" stormed the porter. "Dogs, an' cats, an' parrots, an' mice goes in de baggage-cah."

"Are there any more of them loose?" asked one of the ladies.

"I will see!" cried the tall, slim man. "I forgot about that! Oh, I hope they are safe! If they are not, what shall I do? I have an engagement in Jacksonville, and another in St. Augustine, to fill."

"Do you show 'em on the stage?" snorted the fat man.

"To be sure. Haven't you heard of me, Professor Richard De Haven, the world-famous trainer of mice, rats, and cats? I have exhibited my mice in all the countries of the world, and——"

"Never mind that just now," interrupted Dunston Porter. "Go and see if the others are safe, otherwise we'll have to round up your live-stock before we go to sleep again."

"Oh, I shall never sleep another wink in this car!" sighed a lady.

"I shall!" snorted the fat man, "or else get the price of my berth out of that chap, or the railroad company!"

Professor De Haven ran to his berth and dragged forth a dress-suit-case. A moment later he uttered a genuine howl of dismay.

"They are all gone!"

"How many?" queried Dave, who had followed him.

"Sixteen of them, not counting the two I have here now! O dear, what shall I do?" And the professor wrung his hands in despair.

"Sixteen mice at large!" shrieked one of the ladies. "Oh, stop the train! I want to get off!"

"Can't stop no train now," answered the porter. "We'se got to jest catch dem mice somehow, but I dunno how it's gwine to be done," he went on, scratching his woolly head in perplexity.

"I've got a shotgun along," suggested the fat man. "Might go gunning with that."

"I'll get my cane," said another man.

"I guess the ladies better retire to the next car," suggested a third passenger.

"Yes, yes, let us go, at once!" cried the elderly lady. "Porter, can I get a berth there?"

"Sorry, missus, but I dun reckon all de berths on dis yeah train am tooken."

"See here!" cried Dave, to Professor De Haven. "If the mice are educated, can't you call them to you in some way?"

"To be sure!" cried the professor, struck by the idea. "Why did I not think of that myself? I was too upset to think of anything. Yes, I can whistle for them."

"Whistle for 'em?" snorted the fat man.

"Yes, yes! I always whistle when I feed them.

Please be quiet. I shall have to whistle loudly, for the train makes such a noise and it may be some of my dear pets may not hear me!"

"Humph! Then you better whistle for all you're worth!" returned the man of weight.

Walking slowly up and down the sleeping-car Professor De Haven commenced to whistle in a clear, steady trill. He kept this up for fully a minute and by that time several white mice had shown themselves. They were somewhat scared, but gradually they came to him and ran up on his shoulders.

"Well, doesn't that beat the Dutch!" whispered Roger, half in admiration.

"I shouldn't have been so scared if I had known they were educated," returned Phil.

"Hush!" said Dave. "Give him a chance to gather them all in."

Placing the captured mice in their cage, the professor moved up and down the car once more, opening the berth curtains as he did so. He continued to emit that same clear trill, and soon his shoulders were full of the white mice.

"Only one is missing, little General Pinky," he announced.

"Spit, spat, spow! Where did Pinky go?" murmured Phil.

"Ha! I have him! Dear little Pinky!" cried the professor, as the mouse dropped onto his

shoulder from an upper berth. "Now I have them all, ladies and gentlemen," he announced. "You can go to sleep without alarm. I shall take good care that they do not get away again."

"I dun reckon I'se gwine to take care of dat!" put in the porter. "Dem mice am gwine into de baggage-cah dis minit!"

"But, my dear fellow——" broke in the professor.

"I ain't a-gwine to argy de question, mistah. Da is gwine in de baggage-cah!" And the porter reached out and caught hold of the cage containing the mice.

"Then I shall go with them," answered the professor, resignedly.

"Suit yo' self, sah."

"But they wouldn't hurt a flea!"

"Can't help it, sah, it's de baggage-cah fo' dis collection of wild animals," answered the porter, striding off with the cage in his hands, while the professor followed.

"Talk about something happening!" burst out Roger, when the excitement was over. "This was the funniest experience I ever had."

"I am sure I don't see anything funny about it!" snapped the elderly lady, who overheard the remark. "I think that man ought to be prosecuted!"

"He didn't expect his mice to get loose," said

Dunston Porter. "Just the same, he had no right to bring them in here. As the porter said, all animals must go in the baggage-car."

"Wonder if he'll come back," mused Phil.

"I doubt it," answered Dave. "Well, now I'm going to try to get a little sleep," he added, as he climbed back into his berth. The others followed suit, and presently one after another dropped into slumber. It may be added here that Professor De Haven did not show himself again while on the train, he being afraid of the indignation of those who had been disturbed by his educated mice.

Early the following morning found our friends in the city of Jacksonville, which, as my readers must know, is located on the St. John's River. They did not wait for breakfast but hurried at once in the direction of the Hotel Castor, once a leading hostelry of the city, but which had seen its best day.

"Quite a town," remarked the senator's son, as they passed along.

"Jacksonville is now the main city of Florida," replied Dunston Porter. "It is a great shipping center, and is also well-known as a winter resort."

"How balmy the weather is!" was Phil's comment. "Just like spring at home!"

Dave's uncle had been in Jacksonville several

times and knew the way well. Soon they reached the hotel, and with his heart beating loudly, Dave hurried up to the desk and asked the clerk if Link Merwell and Nick Jasniff were stopping there.

"Never heard of them," replied the clerk, after thinking a moment.

"I have photographs, perhaps you can tell them from that," went on Dave, and he drew from his pocket two photographs, taken at different times at Oak Hall. Each showed a group of students, and in one group was Merwell and in the other Jasniff.

The clerk looked at the pictures closely.

"What is this, some joke?" he asked, suspiciously.

"No, it is a matter of great importance," answered Dave. "We must find those two young men if we possibly can."

"Well, if they are the pair who were here some days ago, you are too late. But their names weren't what you said."

"What did they call themselves?" asked Dunston Porter.

"John Leeds and Samuel Cross," answered the clerk. "They had Room 87, and were here two days."

"Do you know where they went to?" asked Phil.

"I do not."

"Can you tell me anything at all about them?" went on Dave. "It is very important, indeed."

"I might as well tell you," put in Mr. Porter, in a low voice. "They were a pair of criminals."

"You don't say! Well, do you know, I didn't much like their looks," returned the clerk. "And come to think of it, one acted rather scared-like, the fellow calling himself Leeds—this one," and he pointed to the picture of Link Merwell.

"And you haven't any idea where they went to?"

"Not the slightest. They simply paid their bill and went away."

"Did they have any trunks sent off?" asked Roger. "We might find the expressman," he explained, to the others.

"No, they had nothing but hand baggage."

"What—can you remember that?" questioned Dave.

"Yes, each had a suit-case and a small valise,—kind of a tool-bag affair."

"Better look for that schooner, Dave," said his uncle, in a low voice, and in a few minutes more they left the hotel, telling the clerk that they might be back.

"Shall we get breakfast now?" questioned the senator's son. He was beginning to grow hungry.

"You can get something to eat if you wish,

Roger," answered Dave. "I am going to try to locate that schooner first."

"No, I'll wait too, then," said Roger.

The shipping along the St. John's River at Jacksonville is rather extensive. But Dunston Porter knew his business and went direct to one of the offices where he knew he could find out all about the ships going out under charter and otherwise.

"We want to find out about a schooner named the *Emma Brown,* or *Black,* or *Jones,* or some common name like that," said Dave's uncle, to the elderly man in charge. "She was in this harbor several days ago. I don't know if she has sailed or not."

"*Emma Brown,* eh?" mused the shipping-clerk. "Never heard of such a schooner."

"Maybe she was the *Emma Black,* or *Emma Jones,*" suggested Dave.

"No schooner by that name here,—at least not for the past month or two. We had an *Emma Blackney* here about six weeks ago. But she sailed for Nova Scotia."

"Well, try to think of some ship that might be named something like what we said," pleaded Dave. "This is very important."

"A ship that might have sailed from here in the past two or three days," added Roger.

The elderly shipping-clerk leaned back in his

chair and ran his hand through his hair, thoughtfully.

"Maybe you're looking for the *Emma Brower,*" he said. "But she isn't a schooner, she's a bark. She left this port yesterday morning."

"Bound for where?" asked Dave, eagerly.

"Bound for Barbados."

"Where is that?" questioned Phil. "I've heard of the place, but I can't just locate it."

"It's an island of the British West Indies," answered Dunston Porter. "It lies about five hundred miles southeast of Porto Rico."

"If that's the case, then good-by to Merwell and Jasniff," murmured Phil. "We'll never catch them in the wide world."

CHAPTER XVII

MEETING OLD FRIENDS

"THEY may have gone on some other vessel," remarked Roger, after a pause. "Let us find out what other ships have left here during the past few days."

"Say," said Phil, to the elderly shipping-clerk. "Maybe you know my father or some of the captains working for him. His name is Lawrence, of the Lawrence Lines."

"Indeed!" cried the shipping-clerk. "Well, of course I know him! Are you Phil Lawrence?" he questioned, eagerly.

"I am."

"Now isn't that strange!" The man put out his hand. "I don't suppose you know me. My name is Sam Castner. I was once a supercargo for your father, on the *Arvinus*. You took a trip in her with your mother, when you were about ten years old,—down to Tampa and back, from Philadelphia."

"That's right, so I did!" cried the shipowner's son. "I remember you now. We went fishing together."

"So we did, Mr. Lawrence. My, how you've grown since then!" added the former supercargo, as he gazed at Phil's tall and well-built form.

"Mr. Castner, we are in a hurry, and maybe you can help us a good deal," went on Phil. "We are after two fellows who we think sailed in that schooner, or bark, or some vessel that left here within the past two days. They were young fellows, not much older than us boys. Will you aid us in getting on their track?"

"Sure I will," was the ready answer. "What do you know about 'em?"

"All we know is that they went under the names of Leeds and Cross," answered Dave. "But those are not their right names."

"And that they are supposed to have sailed on the ship known by a common name—*Emma* something or other," put in Roger.

"I can soon find out who sailed on the *Emma Brower,*" answered Sam Castner. "Come with me to the next shipping office."

He called another clerk to take charge, and accompanied the party to the next shipping office. On the way he was introduced to Dave and the others.

"One of your father's vessels is in this harbor now," he said to Phil.

"What ship is that?"

"The *Golden Eagle,* Captain Sanders."

"Captain Sanders!" cried Dave. "Do you mean Bob Sanders, who used to sail on the *Stormy Petrel* with Captain Marshall?"

"The same, Mr. Porter. Then you know him?"

"Indeed I do!" returned Dave. "Why, I sailed with him in the South Seas!"

"Well, he's here."

"We'll have to try to see him before we leave," said Phil. "He was a nice fellow."

At the second shipping office further inquiries were made concerning the sailing of the *Emma Brower*. It was learned that the bark had carried not more than half a cargo for Barbados and eight passengers. The names of Merwell, Jasniff, Leeds, or Cross did not appear on the passenger list.

"Did anybody here see those passengers?" asked Dunston Porter.

"I did," returned a young clerk. "I was aboard just before she sailed, and I saw all of them."

"Were there two young fellows, chums?" asked Dave.

"There were, two tall chaps, a bit older than you."

"Did they look like these fellows?" and now our hero brought out the photographs he had used before.

"They certainly did!" cried the clerk. "I remember this fellow distinctly," and he pointed to Jasniff's picture, taken just before that individual had run away from Oak Hall.

"Then they sailed, just as we feared!" returned Dave, and there was something like a groan in his voice.

"Wonder if they took the jewels," murmured Roger.

"Most likely, Roger," answered Dunston Porter.

"But what would they do with them in such an out-of-the-way place as Barbados?"

"I rather imagine their plan is to keep quiet for a while, until this affair blows over. Then they'll either return to the United States, or take a British vessel for England. Barbados is an English possession, you must remember, and a regular line of steamers sail from there to England."

"I wonder if we couldn't charter a steam tug and go after the bark?" mused Dave.

"It might be done," returned his uncle. "But I doubt if we could catch the bark, or even locate her. She has too much of a start."

"Was the bark going to stop at any ports along the way?" asked Phil.

"She was not," answered the young shipping-clerk.

"Then there is nothing to do but to sail for Barbados after them!" cried Dave.

"Sail after them—that far!" ejaculated the senator's son.

"Yes, Roger. Of course you haven't got to go, or Phil either. But I think my uncle and I ought to go after 'em. Don't you think so, Uncle Dunston?"

"I don't know—perhaps," was the slow reply. "We had better make a few more inquiries first, Dave."

"Oh, yes, let us find out all we can about Merwell and Jasniff."

They left the shipping office and walked back to the hotel. Here they had a late breakfast and then commenced to make diligent inquiries concerning all the movements of Merwell and Jasniff. They soon learned that the pair had had plenty of money to spend, and that they had bought many things for the trip to Barbados, even taking along an extra supply of the Turkish cigarettes that came in the boxes with bands of blue and gold.

"I think that that proves my clew of the cigarette box is correct," said Dave.

They visited the local pawnbrokers, and from one of them learned that Merwell had pawned two diamonds for two hundred and fifty dollars. The rascal had told the pawnbroker that the gems

were the property of a rich lady who was awaiting a remittance from France.

"Do these diamonds belong to the Carwith collection?" asked Roger.

"That remains to be found out," answered Dunston Porter, and then he told the pawnbroker to be sure and not let the gems go out of his possession until a further investigation could be made. The man grumbled somewhat, but when Dave's uncle spoke about calling in the officers of the law, he subsided.

"Very well, I'll keep them," he said. "And if anything is wrong, I'll do what the law requires, even if I lose by it."

"Let us visit the *Golden Eagle* and see Bob Sanders," said Phil, late in the afternoon. "Perhaps he knows something about the *Emma Brower,* and her trip."

The others were willing, and sundown found them aboard the vessel belonging to Phil's father. Hardly had they stepped on deck when a grizzled old tar, with white hair, rushed up to Dave.

"If it ain't Dave Porter!" he burst out. "Yes, sir, Dave, wot I haven't seen in a year o' Sundays! How be you, my boy?" And he caught the youth by both hands.

"Billy Dill!" exclaimed our hero, as his face lit up with pleasure. "Where in the world did

you drop from? I thought you had given up the sea."

Billy Dill, as my old readers will remember, was the tar who aided Dave in locating his Uncle Dunston. As related in "Dave Porter in the South Seas," Billy Dill had traveled with our hero to that portion of the globe, in the *Stormy Petrel,* of which Bob Sanders was, at the time, second mate. On returning home, the old tar had been placed in a sanitarium and then a sailors' home, and Dave had imagined he was still in the latter retreat.

"Couldn't give up the sea, Dave," replied the old sailor. "I tried my best, but it wasn't no use. So I goes to Phil's old man, an' I says, says I, 'Give me a berth an' anything I'm wuth,' an' he says, says he, 'How would ye like to sail with Cap'n Sanders, wot sailed with you to the South Seas?' 'Fust-rate,' says I; an' here I be, an' likes it very much."

"Well, I'm glad to see you looking so well," answered Dave.

"It's the sea air done it, lad. When I was ashore I jest knowed I wanted sea air. No more homes ashore fer Billy Dill, not much!" And the old tar shook his head with conviction.

A few minutes later, while the old sailor was shaking hands with the others, and asking and

answering questions, the captain of the ship came up.

"Very glad indeed to see you again," said Captain Sanders, with a broad smile. He looked closely at the boys. "Grown some since I saw you last."

"And you have advanced, too," answered Dave, with a grin. "Let me congratulate you on becoming a captain, Mr. Sanders."

"It's all through the kindness of Mr. Lawrence and Captain Marshall. If it wasn't for them, I shouldn't be in this berth."

"How is Captain Marshall?" asked our hero. The man mentioned was the commander of the ship in which Dave had sailed to the South Seas.

"First-rate, the last I heard of him. He sailed from San Francisco to Manila ten days ago."

"Captain Sanders, what port are you bound for next?" questioned Phil, after greetings had been exchanged all around and a number of other questions had been asked.

"No port as yet, Phil. I'm waiting for orders."

"Have you any idea where you may go to?"

"Something was said about a cargo for Porto Rico. But nothing was settled. I'll know in a couple of days, I think."

"Do any of our ships ever sail to Barbados?"

"Not very often. I could have had a cargo

for that port from here, but the firm didn't take it, and it went to the *Emma Brower.*"

"The very ship we are after!" murmured Dave.

"Could you get another cargo for Barbados, do you think?"

"I don't know—maybe. Why?"

"We want to go there!"

"You do! That isn't much of a place."

"But we have a reason for wanting to go," went on Phil. And then, knowing he could trust Captain Sanders, he told the story of the stolen gems and the search for Merwell and Jasniff.

"Humph! that's a queer yarn," mused the captain of the *Golden Eagle.* "Supposing I got a cargo for that port—you'd go along?"

"I would," answered the shipowner's son, promptly. "That is, if dad would let me—and I'm sure he would."

"So would I go," added Dave.

"I'd have to go—to look after the others," said Dunston Porter, with a smile.

"Well, you can't leave me in the cold," came from Roger. "If the rest went, I'd go too."

"Come down to the cabin and talk it over," said Captain Sanders, and led the way across the deck and down the companionway.

Once below they were invited to remain to supper and did so. While at the meal the boys and

Dunston Porter told all they knew concerning the case against Merwell and Jasniff, and the captain told what he knew about the *Emma Brower* and her commander.

"I am going to telegraph to my father about this," said Phil, a little later. "If this vessel can get a cargo for Barbados she might as well sail for that port as anywhere."

"Well, I'm willing," answered Captain Sanders. "When will you send word to him?"

"Right away—I'll send him a telegram at once."

"I hope it turns out all right," said Dave. "I feel it is my duty to get after Merwell and Jasniff, and do it as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XVIII

OFF FOR BARBADOS

THE next three days were busy ones for the boys and Dunston Porter. Telegrams were sent back and forth between Phil and his father, and also between Dave and Mr. Wadsworth.

"Here is news!" cried our hero, after receiving one of the messages. "Just listen to this." And he read the following, from the jewelry manufacturer:

"Clew in Boston proved to be false, also clew in New York. Hope you are on the right track and get gems. Spare no expense if you feel you are right."

"And here is a telegram from my dad," said Phil. "He tells us—Captain Sanders and myself—to use our own judgment."

"Can you get a cargo for Barbados, Phil?" asked Roger.

"We can get a half-cargo."

"At once?"

"Yes, that is, inside of two days."

"Then by all means take it, Phil!" cried Dave. "I know Mr. Wadsworth will stand the extra expense. And if he won't, I know my father will."

"Where is your Uncle Dunston?" questioned the shipowner's son.

"He's out on a little business trip. He got a telegram from New York that upset him somewhat. I hope it isn't anything serious," added Dave, soberly.

The boys rushed off to talk the matter over with Captain Sanders. They found the master of the vessel at the shipping office, talking over the matter of a cargo for Barbados.

"Four men want to take passage with us, if we go," said the captain. "That will help pay for the trip, since they are willing to pay good passage money."

"We want you to take that half-cargo," said Phil, and explained matters.

"All right, if you say so," answered Captain Sanders. "But you had better speak to Mr. Porter about it first."

Half an hour later Dunston Porter came driving up in a cab. He was plainly excited.

"I've got to go to New York at once," he said. "I must look after some valuable investments in Wall Street. Do you think you boys can get along alone?"

"I think we can, Uncle Dunston," answered

Dave. "You know we are used to taking care of ourselves," and he smiled faintly.

"Then go ahead and do as you think best."

"We want Captain Sanders to start for Barbados as soon as he can," went on our hero, and told of the telegrams received.

A general talk followed, lasting until Dunston Porter had to ride away to catch the train for New York.

"You must be right, and Merwell and Jasniff must be guilty," he said. "And if they are, spare no expense in catching them. I think the quicker you start for Barbados the better. And as soon as you arrive do your best to locate the rascals and have the authorities arrest them. And above all things, keep your eyes open for the jewels, for we need them much more than we need to catch Merwell and Jasniff. To catch the rascals and miss the gems will do us no good."

"I understand, Uncle Dunston," answered Dave. "And if the jewels are anywhere around we'll locate them."

"Then good-by and good luck!" finished Dunston Porter, and in a minute more he was off.

As soon as he was gone the boys and Captain Sanders commenced preparations for the trip to Barbados. An extra number of 'longshoremen were engaged, so that the half-cargo to be taken along could be gotten aboard quickly, and the boys

spent their time in buying such things as they needed for the trip.

"They tell me it is pretty warm down there," said Roger. "So we had better buy some thin suits."

"And we had better go armed," added Phil. "No telling what trouble we may run into, in trying to corner Merwell and Jasniff. Merwell is no great fighter, but Jasniff is a brute."

"Yes, I'll take no chances with Jasniff," answered Dave. He had not forgotten his quarrel at Oak Hall with that bully, and how Jasniff had attacked him with an Indian club, as related in detail in "Dave Porter's Return to School."

At last all was in readiness for the trip, and the boys and the other passengers, four burly Englishmen, went aboard. Fortunately, the *Golden Eagle* was well provided with staterooms, so there was but little crowding. Dave had a small room to himself and next to him were his chums, with Captain Sanders and the first mate opposite. Billy Dill was, of course, in the forecastle with the other sailors.

"It's grand to have you along ag'in," he said, to Dave and Phil. "Seems like old times, when we sailed the Pacific."

"So it does," answered our hero.

"Only ye ain't a-lookin' for no uncle this trip, be you?" And the old tar chuckled.

"No, Billy, we are looking for somebody quite different—two rascals who ran away with a lot of diamonds."

"Mackerel an' codfish! Ye don't tell me, Dave! Your diamonds?"

"No, but some diamonds that were left with a close friend of mine. If they are not recovered, my friend will be almost ruined."

"Jumpin' dogfish! Then I hope you catch them lubbers! If so be I can help ye any, don't be afeered to call on me," added the old sailor, earnestly.

"All right; I'll remember that," replied Dave.

Early the next day the *Golden Eagle* slipped down the St. John's River and past the jetties and the lighthouse into the Atlantic Ocean. It was warm and clear, with a good wind blowing from the west, an ideal day for the departure. The boys remained on deck, watching the scenery of the winding stream and then the fading shoreline, and then went below to arrange their belongings, for the trip to Barbados would occupy some time.

"I hope we don't get seasick," remarked the senator's son.

"Well, if we do, we'll have to stand it," replied Phil. "But don't let's think about it."

"What I am wishing, is that we'll have good

weather and a quick passage," remarked Dave. "We can't get to Barbados any too quick for me."

"I was looking up the place in the shipping-guide," went on Roger. "It's not much of an island, only twenty-one miles long by fifteen wide. The whole population is only about two hundred thousand, mostly English."

"The smaller the population the easier it will be to find Merwell and Jasniff," was the comment of the shipowner's son.

"Well, there may be a good many hiding-places on an island twenty-one miles long by fifteen miles wide," added Dave, with a grin.

"Oh, we'll rake the island with a fine-tooth comb, if we have to," cried Roger.

"Roger, was your father quite willing to let you go on the trip?"

"Yes. He and mother are now in Washington, you know, and as the school is closed, I'd either have to go to the Capital, or stay with you. And I told him I'd much rather be with you and Phil."

"And we are glad to have you with us!" cried Phil, and Dave nodded, to show that he felt the same way about it.

"What do you think about the other passengers?" asked Phil, in a lower voice, so that nobody else might hear.

"I don't think I'll like them very much," re-

plied the senator's son. "That man named Geswick is very loud and dictatorial."

"Yes, and the chap named Pardell is little better," returned Dave.

"What line are they in, Phil, did you hear?"

"Oh, they are traveling, that's all. They came to this country from London, and they are going back by the way of Barbados."

"They seem to have some money."

"Yes, but Captain Sanders told me that they hang on to it pretty well—more so than he at first expected they would."

The first day passed rapidly and the *Golden Eagle* made good headway. The boys spent most of the time on deck, amusing themselves as best they could. They talked to Captain Sanders and his mate, and also visited with Billy Dill. Occasionally they conversed with the four Englishmen, but they noticed that the Britishers were inclined to keep to themselves.

"I guess it is just as well, too," said Dave to his chums. "They are not our sort at all."

"Unless I miss my guess, they have had some sort of quarrel among themselves," remarked Phil. "They were disputing over something early this morning and again just before dinner."

Several days passed, and the boys commenced to feel quite at home on the ship. None of them had been seasick, for which all were thankful.

"The weather has been in our favor," said Captain Sanders. "If it keeps on like this, we'll make Barbados in record time."

"Billy Dill said he smelt a storm," returned Dave.

"Hum! Is that so?" mused the captain. "Well, he's a pretty good weather-sharp, I must confess. I'll take another look at the glass," and he walked off to do so.

The storm came up during the night, and Dave was awakened to find himself rolling from one side of his berth to the other. He arose, and as he did so he heard an exclamation from Roger.

"What is it, Roger?" he called out.

"I—I guess I'm seasick!" answered the senator's son. "Gracious, how this old tub rolls!"

"Don't call the *Golden Eagle* a tub!" returned Phil. "Say, can I do anything for you?" he went on sympathetically.

"Yes, tell Captain Sanders to keep the boat from rocking."

"Better lie down again, Roger," said Dave, entering the stateroom. "It's a little better than standing up."

"Oh, I—I guess I'm not so very ba-badly off," gasped the sufferer. "But I do wish the storm was over."

"We all wish that."

But, instead of clearing away, the storm in-

creased in violence, and by nine o'clock in the morning the wind was blowing close to a gale. Both the captain and the mate were on deck, and the former advised the boys and the other passengers to remain below. Two of the Englishmen were very seasick and found all manner of fault because of the storm.

"I'd never have come on this treasure hunt had I known I was to be so sick!" groaned one.

"What bloody luck!" said the other sick man. "All the pirates' gold in the world is not worth it!"

"Stow it!" cried the man named Geswick. "You know you weren't to mention what we were after."

"Nobody can hear us, in this storm," replied the first man who had spoken.

"Those boys might hear," put in the fellow named Pardell.

"Oh, well, they are only boys. Besides, they'd not dare to follow us up to Cave Island——"

"Hush, I tell you!" cried Geswick, savagely. "Do learn to keep your tongue quiet." And then the men continued to talk in whispers.

Dave had been passing the staterooms of the Englishmen during this conversation and he could not help but hear what was said. When he rejoined his chums he told them of the talk.

"They must be on the hunt after pirates' gold,"

said Phil. "Well, they are not the first to do that kind of searching. Party after party has sailed down here for the same purpose."

"Yes, and each party has been unsuccessful, so far as I know," answered Dave.

"Perhaps they have some extra-good clew," suggested Roger, trying to forget his seasickness.

"Perhaps," returned Dave. "Well, if they can find any pirates' gold on any of these islands they are welcome to it, so far as I am concerned. All I want to get hold of are the Carwith jewels."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MISSING SHIP

"How much longer do you think this storm will last?"

It was Dave who asked this question, of Captain Sanders, when the latter came down to get a bite for breakfast. To get a regular meal, with the vessel pitching and tossing wildly, was out of the question.

"I don't know, Dave," was the grave answer. "I am hoping the wind will die down by sunset. But the storm may last several days."

"Are we in any danger?" questioned Phil.

"There is always danger during a storm," answered the master of the *Golden Eagle.* "But I hope to weather this blow without much trouble."

"Can we be of any assistance?" went on our hero.

"No, boys. There is nothing you can do but keep yourselves from falling overboard. How is Roger?"

"A little better."

"I heard that two of those Englishmen are

pretty sick," went on Captain Sanders, with a faint smile.

"They are."

"It's queer to me that they sailed with us. It's not such a pleasant voyage."

"I overheard a little of their talk," answered Dave, and, knowing he could trust the captain, he related what had been said.

"Pirates' gold, eh?" muttered the master of the ship. "Most of those yarns are fairy-stories. I've known expedition after expedition to be fitted out, to search for treasures said to be hidden by the old-time buccaneers, but I never saw a man yet who got even a smell of a treasure. Where were they going for it, Dave?"

"I don't know. I think one of them mentioned Cave Island. Is there such a place?"

"There may be, although I never heard of it. Many of the islands in this part of the globe, being of volcanic origin, contain caves."

"They must expect to get to Cave Island from Barbados."

"More than likely," answered the captain, and then hurried on deck again.

The storm continued for the remainder of the day, but by nightfall the wind commenced to die down, and by midnight the clouds had passed and the stars were shining brightly. In the morning

the big sun came out of the sea to the east like a globe of fire.

"Now we are going to have some warm weather," remarked Billy Dill, and the old tar was right. As the sun mounted in the heavens it grew positively hot, until the boys had to go to their staterooms and don thinner clothing. With the departure of the storm, Roger's seasickness left him, but the two Englishmen remained slightly unwell for some time longer.

"Phew! how warm it is!" remarked Phil. "And just think of it!—up at home they are having snow and ice!"

With the passing of the storm, the boys settled down as before. They saw but little of the Englishmen, especially of the pair who were sick. But one day something happened which came close to causing a crisis.

The boys were seated on the rear deck, talking over matters in general, when a strong puff of wind caused a sheet of paper to blow from somewhere ahead towards Dave. He reached out and caught the sheet just as it was about to go overboard.

"Hello, what's this?" he cried, as he looked the sheet over. "Must be some sort of a chart."

"It is," answered Roger, gazing at the paper. "See, here is a spot marked Barbados, and an-

other marked Cave Island, a little to the eastward."

"Why, look what it says, up here!" cried Phil. "'*Map of the Don Amorandos Treasure, buried in* 1715.' Say, do you think those Englishmen——"

"Hi, you! Give me that map!" bawled a voice from near by, and with a very red face, the Englishman named Geswick bore down on the boys. "How dare you look at this?" he went on, as he snatched the sheet out of their hands and folded it up.

"We wanted to see what it was and whom it belonged to," answered Dave, as calmly as he could.

"You had no right to look at it," stormed Andrew Geswick. "That is private property."

"Then why did you let it fall in our hands?" asked Phil.

"If it hadn't been for Dave, it would have gone overboard," put in Roger.

"Humph!" The man fell back a little. "Well, I am thankful for that. But you boys had no right to look at it," he grumbled.

"Why, it's only a chart, isn't it?" asked the senator's son, curiously.

"Never mind what it is!" answered Andrew Geswick, sharply. "Did you read what was on it?" he demanded, an instant later.

"Hi, you! Give me that map!"—*Page 180.*

"We saw it was a chart," answered Dave, and looked knowingly at his chums, to make them keep silent.

"It—er—it belongs to Mr. Pardell and he is very particular about it," went on the Englishman. And then without another word he walked away.

"My, isn't he sweet!" muttered Phil.

"Just as sweet as a can of sour milk," answered the senator's son. "Dave, I guess you wish you had allowed that map to blow overboard."

"Not exactly that, Roger. But he might have been a little more thankful for saving something that he thinks so valuable."

"Do you think there is anything in this treasure idea?" questioned Phil, after a pause.

"No, Phil. That is, there may be some lost treasure, secreted by the pirates and buccaneers of old, but I doubt if anybody will ever find it—excepting by accident."

"If there was a treasure on this Cave Island, we might hunt for it," went on the shipowner's son.

"Phil, don't let that bee get into your bonnet!" cried Roger. "Many a man has gone crazy looking for pirates' gold. Better drop it, and think of how we are to round up Merwell and Jasniff."

"Well, I'd like to go to Cave Island anyway," said Phil. "We might——" And then he stopped short, as he saw Geswick and Pardell near by. The Englishmen had been listening to part of the conversation.

"So you'd like to go to Cave Island, would you?" cried Andrew Geswick, his face red with rage. "You take my advice and keep away from that place!"

"Say, do you own that island?" demanded Phil, getting angry because of the other's dictatorial manner.

"No, we don't own the island. But we——" Andrew Geswick stopped short as his companion plucked him by the sleeve. "Never mind, you keep away from it, that's all," he growled.

"We'll go there if we want to," called out Phil.

"If you do you may get into trouble," called back Pardell. Then he and his companion disappeared in the direction of the cabin.

"They are touchy enough," was Roger's comment. "Phil, you had better drop Cave Island after this."

"I'll talk about it as much as I please," grumbled the shipowner's son. "Those fellows make me tired. They act as if they owned the earth!"

Sunday was a quiet day on shipboard. The Englishmen did not show themselves excepting at meals, and the boys were content to leave them severely alone. They told Captain Sanders of the chart and of the talk that had occurred.

"Let them alone, lads," said the commander of the *Golden Eagle*. "I'll venture to say that sooner or later they'll find out they are on a wild goose chase."

"The only one that seems to be anyway nice is the fellow named Giles Borden," said Dave. "He is rather quiet. The other fellow, Rumney, is almost as bad as Geswick and Pardell."

"So I've noticed, Dave. And the queer part of it is, Borden paid for the passages. He appears to be the only one with money."

"Maybe he is backing the expedition," suggested Roger.

"I'm sorry for him if he is," answered the captain.

The Bahama Islands had been passed, and now they were in the vicinity of Porto Rico. Then commenced the trip southward, through the Lesser Antilles.

"This is the spot for active volcanoes," observed Phil. "Don't you remember how the Island of Martinique suffered?"

"Oh, don't speak of volcanoes!" cried Roger.

"I have no use for them—or for earthquakes either."

"There must be hundreds of islands around here," observed Dave. "The charts are full of them."

"That must make navigation difficult," came from Phil.

"Oh, I reckon Captain Sanders knows what he is about."

"Wonder how soon we'll run into the harbor at Bridgetown?" mused the shipowner's son, the place he mentioned being the main seaport of Barbados.

"Inside of three days, I hope, Phil," answered our hero.

"Merwell and Jasniff must be there by this time."

"It's more than likely—unless something happened to delay them," returned Dave.

At last came the day when they sighted Barbados and ran into the harbor of Bridgetown. The place was a picturesque one, but the boys had just then no time to view the scenery or the shipping. As soon as it could be accomplished, they went ashore, and Captain Sanders went with them, leaving his vessel in charge of the first mate.

"You may have trouble with those two rascals, if you find them," said the commander of the

Golden Eagle. "I'll be on deck to help you all I can."

"Shall we go to the hotel first?" questioned Roger.

"Might as well," answered Phil. "They'd strike for the hotel first thing, after a sea trip like that. Maybe they were both seasick."

"I hope they were—it would serve them right," growled the senator's son.

Dave and the captain were willing, and a little later walked into the Royal George Hotel. Here the boys looked at the register, but found no names that they could recognize. Then Dave brought out his photographs of Merwell and Jasniff and showed them to the hotel proprietor and his clerk.

"Nobody here that looks like either of them," said the proprietor, while his clerk also shook his head.

"They came in on the *Emma Brower,*" said Captain Sanders.

"The *Emma Brower!*" cried the hotel man. "Is she in?"

"Why, I suppose so," and now the commander of the *Golden Eagle* showed his surprise.

"She wasn't in last night, and the agents were a bit worried about her. I know the agents personally, you see."

"Then maybe she isn't in yet!" cried Dave.

"Let us go down to the docks and find out about this."

They lost no time in visiting the docks and the shipping offices. There they learned that nothing had been heard of the *Emma Brower* since the vessel had left Jacksonville.

"We must have passed her on the way!" cried Dave, to Captain Sanders. "Could we do that?"

"Perhaps, since we only had half a cargo, Dave. Besides, maybe that vessel was damaged by the storm."

"I wonder how soon she will get in?" mused Roger.

At this the captain shrugged his shoulders.

"It is impossible to say. I've known a ship to be a week and sometimes nearly a month overdue. And I've known a ship to drop out altogether," he added, soberly.

"Oh, don't say you think she has gone down!" cried Dave, in alarm.

"Let us hope not, Dave."

The day passed, and also the next and the next. The cargo of the *Golden Eagle* was unloaded, and the Englishmen, who had been passengers, left for parts unknown. As each day slipped by, Dave grew more serious. What if the *Emma Brower* had gone down, carrying Merwell, Jasniff, and the Carwith jewels with her?

CHAPTER XX

LANDING ON CAVE ISLAND

At the end of a week Dave was more worried than ever. Each day he and his chums went down to the shipping offices and each day returned to the hotel disappointed. Not a word had been heard concerning the missing vessel and those on board.

The *Golden Eagle* was all ready to sail on her return trip to the United States, but Phil told Captain Sanders to wait.

"Perhaps we'll hear to-day," he said, and this was repeated day after day.

It was very warm and the boys were glad they had brought along some thin clothing. They scarcely knew what to do with themselves, and Dave was particularly sober.

"I suppose Mr. Wadsworth and the rest are waiting to hear from me," he said to his chums. "But what is the use of sending a message when I haven't anything to say?"

Another Sunday passed, and on Monday the boys visited the *Golden Eagle,* and then went with Captain Sanders to the nearest shipping office.

"Something is going on!" cried the senator's son, as he noticed an unusual crowd congregated. "Must be news of some sort."

"Let us find out what it is!" returned our hero, quickly.

"The *Emma Brower* has been heard from," said a man, standing near. "That's the vessel that was missing, don't you know," he added.

"What of her?" asked Dave.

"Went down in that terrible storm we had about ten days ago."

"Down!" gasped all of the boys, while Captain Sanders looked the concern he felt.

"So they say. I do not know the particulars," went on the man as he walked away.

It did not take the boys and the captain long to get into the shipping office and there they learned as many of the particulars as were known. A tramp steamer from Porto Rico had come in bringing word that she had sighted portions of a wreck while out at sea, and an investigation proved the same to belong to the *Emma Brower*. A portion of a small boat had been picked up, but nothing had been seen of sailors or passengers.

"Where was this?" questioned Dave, when he could get the chance.

"The captain of the steamer says about two miles west of Cave Island."

"Cave Island!" cried Phil. "Why, that is where those Englishmen were going to hunt for that pirates' treasure."

"Two miles from Cave Island," mused our hero. "If the *Emma Brower* went down, perhaps those in some of the small boats got to that place."

"Perhaps," answered Captain Sanders.

The boys and the captain remained at the shipping office for an hour, getting all the details possible concerning the wreck, including the exact latitude and longitude where the vessel was supposed to have gone down.

"Let us sail for that spot and see if we can discover anything," suggested Dave, as the party came away. "We may find some of those in the small boats."

"Just what I was going to suggest," said Phil.

"Well, it's up to you, Phil, to say what we shall do," answered Captain Sanders. "Your father sent me word that I was to look to you for orders—that is, within reasonable limits,—and I know you won't be unreasonable."

"Well, we want to get back to the United States, anyway," said Roger. "And this would be on our way."

"How soon can you get ready for the trip?" asked our hero, of the master of the *Golden Eagle*.

"We are all provisioned, so it won't take but a few hours," was the reply.

"Then let us sail to-day."

"You don't want to wait for more word?" asked Roger.

"No, Roger; I don't think it will do any good," answered our hero.

The matter was discussed at the hotel, and a little later the boys paid their bill and had their baggage taken to the ship. In the meantime Captain Sanders had prepared for the trip, and two hours later the *Golden Eagle* was moving out of the harbor of Bridgetown.

"How long will it take us to run to that spot where they think the ship went down?" asked Phil.

"Not more than a day and a half—it depends somewhat on the wind," answered Captain Sanders.

The boys tried to settle themselves, but this was impossible. Dave could not keep still, and paced the deck by the hour, or scanned the bosom of the ocean with the marine glasses Captain Sanders loaned him.

Only once came a thrill of excitement. A bit of wreckage was sighted and the ship sailed toward it. It was a yardarm, and to it were lashed a cask and several boxes, one of the latter bearing

the name *Emma Brower*. Not a sign of a human being could be seen.

"If a man was on that wreckage the storm tore him loose," said Captain Sanders.

"How terrible!" whispered Roger.

"And think of it, it may have been Merwell, or Jasniff, or both of them!" returned Phil.

On the following day they reached the latitude and longitude as given by the captain of the tramp steamer. In that vicinity they saw some smaller wreckage, but nothing of importance.

"Cave Island is two miles east of here," said Captain Sanders.

"Any other islands around?" asked Dave.

"Nothing within fifteen or twenty miles."

"Then, if the crew and passengers took to the small boats, wouldn't they be likely to steer for Cave Island?"

"I think so,—that is, if the storm let 'em do so. It might be the wind would force 'em the other way. But I think it would be a wise move to sail for Cave Island and take a look around. The one trouble is, so I learned at Barbados, the island hasn't any sort of harbor. We'll have to lay-to outside and go ashore in a small boat."

"Perhaps it won't be necessary to go ashore," said Roger.

"Oh, it can be done easily enough."

The bow of the *Golden Eagle* was turned eastward. They ran slowly, all hands keeping their eyes open for more signs of the wreck.

Presently they came in sight of the reef outside of Cave Island. It formed a large horseshoe, and beyond was the island itself, long, low, and irregular, the shore fringed with tropical trees and bushes and the center rocky and barren.

"This ain't no easy place to land," said Billy Dill to Dave, as the sails were lowered and the ship was brought about. "If them critters from the wreck got here in their small boats in the dark they must have had a fierce time o' it!"

"I don't see a sign of a boat anywhere," said Dave, as he swept the reef and the shore with the glasses. "And not a sign of a human being either," he added, with a sinking heart.

"That's queer, too, lad, if they came here. Fust thing I'd think about, if I was wrecked, would be to put up a signal o' distress."

It was growing dark, yet Dave and his chums were anxious to go ashore, to see if they could discover anything concerning those who had been wrecked, so Captain Sanders ordered out the largest of the small boats.

"I'll go with you," he said. "And we can take Billy Dill and Smiley."

"We had better take some things along—in case we remain ashore all night," said Dave.

"To be sure. And we'll go armed, lad—no telling what may turn up."

"Any wild animals here?" questioned the senator's son.

"I don't know, but I don't think so—that is, not large ones. You'll find rabbits maybe, and any number of birds."

Soon the small boat was ready to go ashore. Billy Dill and the other sailor, Smiley, were at the oars, while Captain Sanders was in the stern, to steer and give directions.

"If it starts to blow better move off a bit," said the captain to the mate. "No use in taking chances around these reefs."

"I'll watch out," was the answer. "I know just what a blow down here means, and I'll keep her off."

"Do you think we'll have another storm?" asked Dave.

"Can't tell about that, lad. Sometimes a storm comes up pretty quick in these parts."

Soon the small boat was close to the breakers. The water boiled and foamed on every side, and it must be confessed that Roger was somewhat scared. Dave and Phil did not mind, although wishing it was over.

"To starboard, hard!" shouted the captain, when the first of the breakers was encountered. "Now ease off, lads! Lively now, and hard!

Starboard again! Keep it up! There, straight ahead! Bend to it, bend I tell you! A little more to starboard—not too much! There, now we are out of it!" And in a moment more the small boat was out of the breakers and riding into a tiny cove, where there was a stretch of sand, dotted with palms. The two sailors were all but exhausted and glad enough to rest up and allow the boat to drift ashore.

"So this is Cave Island?" remarked Dave, as he hopped out on the sand, followed by his chums. "Well, it doesn't look much different from the other islands in this portion of the globe."

After everybody had alighted, the small boat was pulled up on the sand and tied to a palm tree.

"What's to do next?" asked the shipowner's son, as he looked inquiringly at Dave. "This is your expedition, Dave."

"How big around do you suppose this island is, Captain?" asked our hero.

"Four or five miles at least."

"Then we could walk completely around it in a couple of hours, that is, if we found it wasn't too rough in spots."

"You won't find it smooth like this all around, lad."

"Some of us might walk in one direction and some in the other," suggested Roger. "Then, if

"To starboard, hard!" shouted the captain.—*Page 193.*

either party discovered anything, it could signal to the other by firing a pistol or a gun." For both sorts of weapons had been brought along.

"Whatever you wish to do to-day must be done quickly," said Captain Sanders. "It will soon be night, and, as you know, darkness comes on quickly in this part of the world."

The matter was discussed for a few minutes, and then it was decided to leave the sailors in charge of the boat, while Captain Sanders and Phil walked up the shore and Dave and Roger traveled in the opposite direction.

For fully a quarter of a mile Dave and the senator's son found it an easy matter to push along, for the sandy shore was smooth and offered no barrier to their advance. But then they came to a series of rocks, jutting out into the ocean, and here progress was more difficult.

"We'll not get around this island to-night," remarked the senator's son, after climbing over a particularly sharp line of rocks. "This takes a fellow's wind."

"Look!" cried our hero, as he pointed to a spot between the rocks. "What do you make that out to be, Roger?"

"It's the wreck of a rowboat!" cried the other.

"Just what I thought. Let us go down and look it over."

With care, so as not to sprain an ankle, the two chums climbed down to the split in the rocks. By this time it was growing dark, and in the hollow they could not see clearly.

It was the remains of a rowboat which they had discovered. The small craft was split from end to end, so as to be utterly useless. Near it lay a broken oar and a broken-open box that had contained provisions of some sort.

"That boat is from the *Emma Brower!*" cried Dave, after an investigation. "And that proves that some of the people from the wrecked ship came to this island!"

"Yes, but are they alive, Dave, or were they drowned?" questioned Roger.

"That remains to be found out, Roger. I sincerely hope they are alive."

CHAPTER XXI

INTO A CAVE AND OUT

"LET us look around for footprints, Roger," said Dave, as the pair scrambled up the rocks once more. "If any persons landed from that smashed rowboat they'd have to walk in some direction, and the ground is soft back of here."

"The trouble is, it is growing so dark," returned the senator's son. "In a little while we won't be able to find our way back. We should have brought a lantern along."

"I've got something almost as good," answered our hero, and took from his pocket a little electric flashlight—one of the kind that emits a tiny flash of light when the button at the end is pressed.

"Good enough! That's first-rate!"

The pair were soon down from the rocks. Under the palm trees it was now dark, and Dave used the electric flashlight to advantage.

"Here are footprints!" he cried, presently. "Six pairs! That shows that at least a half dozen persons came ashore in that boat. Those six may have been carrying others."

"Shall we set up a shout?"

"I don't know, Roger. If Merwell and Jasniff were around I'd like to surprise them. If they discovered us first, and they had the jewels, they'd surely hide the gems and then say they didn't have them."

"I believe that, Dave. Well, let us follow the footsteps and see where they lead to."

"Another thing. Do you remember those Englishmen? They may be on this island, and if so, I'd rather steer clear of them."

"So would I, they were so disagreeable—all but that one chap, Borden."

The trail led among the palm trees and then up a rise of ground where grew a number of bushes. Here the boys had to proceed more slowly, for fear of missing the way.

"It's queer that they should call this spot Cave Island," observed the senator's son. "We haven't seen anything that looks like a cave."

"The caves may be on the other side of the island," answered Dave. "Look out, Roger, there is a split in the rocks! Let us jump over to yonder bushes."

Dave placed the flashlight in his pocket and made the leap he had mentioned, and his chum came after him.

A most astonishing thing followed. The bushes where they landed gave way, and down they rolled on some smooth rocks. They tried to stay their

progress, but this was impossible, and they continued to roll for several minutes. Then Dave bumped into some sort of barrier and Roger landed beside him.

"For gracious sake, what's this?" gasped Roger, when he felt able to speak. The breath had been all but knocked out of him.

"I guess we have found one of the caves," answered Dave, grimly. "Phew, but that was some roll, wasn't it!"

"We must be down near the center of the earth," murmured the senator's son.

"Not quite as bad as that. But we came down some distance, I admit."

"Flash that light around, Dave, and let us see where we are."

"I will if the light hasn't been smashed," replied our hero. "I rolled over it half a dozen times."

He brought out the little flashlight and tried it. Fortunately, it was still in working order. As the rays fell around the lads, they stared at each other, blankly.

"What do you make of this, Dave?"

"Looks as if it was cut out of the solid rock, Roger."

"It certainly is some cave. Wonder where it leads to?"

"We might follow the opening and find out."

"Excuse me, I'd rather climb out the way we came in."

"It certainly doesn't look very inviting."

The two boys found themselves in an irregular opening of the rocks, fifty feet wide and perhaps twice that in length. On one side was the smooth slope down which they had come; on the other a dark hole that looked as if it might lead to some bottomless pit. A jagged rock in the center of the underground chamber had been the means of stopping them from dropping to the unknown depths below them.

"We were lucky to hit this rock," said Dave, with something like a shiver. "If we hadn't——" He did not finish.

"Let us get out. It gives me the creeps to stay here," returned his chum.

"All right, Roger, I'm willing. But it is going to be hard work crawling back, those rocks are so smooth."

"We've got to get back!"

"I can't hold the light and climb too. And if I place it on the rocks it may roll away and go down into that hole," went on our hero.

"Oh, put it in your pocket again and we'll try to climb back in the dark. We know the direction."

Dave did as his chum suggested, and then commenced a climb that neither of the lads ever for-

got. The rocks were so smooth in spots that at times to get a foothold was next to impossible. Once Roger slid back several feet and would have gone to the bottom had not Dave caught and held him.

"Take it slowly, Roger," was our hero's advice. "If you go to the bottom, you may be killed!"

"I'll hang—on!" gasped the other. "But I wi-wish I was out—of—th-this!"

"Well, I wish the same."

It took fully a quarter of an hour longer to get out of the rocky cave, and when the boys reached the surface of the earth they were so exhausted they could do little but sit on the ground and pant for breath.

"It's Cave Island right enough," was the comment of the senator's son. "But excuse me from tumbling into any more such openings!"

"I guess the best thing we can do is to go back to the boat," said Dave. "We can't discover much in this darkness. We can start out again early in the morning."

"All right, back to the boat it is," and the pair set out on the return along the sandy shore.

"I see a light!" cried Dave, after about half the distance to where the rowboat had been left was covered. And he pointed to a spot inland, among the trees.

"Maybe it's a camp of some sort," replied Roger. "It seems to be quite a distance away."

"Shall we go and see what it is?"

"Hadn't we better get the others first, Dave?"

"All right, if you think best."

So they continued on the way to where the rowboat had been left. They came up to find that Captain Sanders and Phil had not yet returned. Smiley was snoring on the sand, while Billy Dill sat near by on guard.

"Find anybody?" queried the old tar, eagerly.

"We found one of the caves, and we saw a light at a distance," answered Dave. "We want to investigate that light, as soon as the others get back."

Dave and Roger sat down, to rest and to wait, and thus another half-hour went by. With nothing else to do, Billy Dill took a nap, and the boys allowed the old sailor to slumber on.

"It's queer the captain and Phil don't return," remarked Roger, presently. "They must have gone much further than we did."

"Maybe they fell into one of those caves, Roger."

"Oh, I trust not!"

Another half-hour went by and still the others did not put in an appearance. By this time Dave was getting worried.

"Let us take a walk along the shore and look

for them," he said, and Roger agreed, and they started off.

They had covered less than a quarter of a mile when they came in sight of a campfire, well-hidden between the rough rocks back from the water's edge. Around the campfire were huddled the forms of several men, evidently sailors.

"Perhaps those men are from the *Emma Brower,*" said Dave, in a low tone.

"I don't see anything of Captain Sanders and Phil," remarked the senator's son.

"No. And yet they must have seen this campfire, if they came this way. What can it mean, Dave?"

"I don't know."

"Shall we go up to the campfire and talk to those fellows?"

"I don't see why not. I am not afraid of them."

"Do you see anybody that looks like Jasniff or Merwell?"

"No, those fellows are all plain sailors, by their outfits."

Dave continued to advance and Roger followed, and neither halted until he was within the glow of the campfire. Then Dave called out:

"Hello, messmates!"

At this cry the four sailors around the fire sprang to their feet. At a glance Dave and Roger

saw that they were in tatters, and that they looked hungry and careworn.

"Hello, yourself!" answered one of the tars, stepping towards the boys. "Who are you?"

"Passengers from the *Golden Eagle,*" answered Dave.

"Oh, some more of that crowd, eh?" cried the tar.

"Then you've seen the others,—the captain and a young fellow like ourselves?" queried Roger.

"Yes, they were here only a short while ago."

"They said they'd be back, and take us aboard an' git us something to eat," put in a second of the sailors.

"An' we need that grub putty bad, we do," added a third.

"Ain't had no decent meal since we got wrecked," came from the fourth. "A few fish an' birds, an' that's all."

"You are from the *Emma Brower?*" questioned Dave, eagerly.

"You've struck it, messmate. She went down in the storm an' we come putty nigh goin' down with her."

"Well, you shall have all you want to eat in a little while. Tell me where the others of our crowd went."

"They went after the two chaps as ran away."

"Ran away?" cried Dave. "From where?"

"From here."

"They must have been Jasniff and Merwell!" murmured Roger.

"Who were those fellows?" asked our hero.

"Two passengers from the bark. They came ashore with us, and they stayed with us until your captain and the other young fellow come along. Then they up anchors and away like the old Nick was after 'em," explained the tar who had first spoken.

"Were they young fellows like ourselves?"

"Yes,—a bit older, maybe. Named Ford and Smith."

"They must have been Jasniff and Merwell," said Dave, to his chum.

"I wonder if they managed to save the jewels," whispered the senator's son.

"Did they have any baggage?" asked Dave of the sailors.

"Baggage? Not much! We didn't have no time for baggage when the ship went down. It was every man fer himself. The cap'n got off in one boat with some o' the passengers, an' the mate got off with some of the crew in another boat, an' we got off by ourselves. It was blowin' big guns, I can tell ye, an' it looks like we would be swamped most every minit. I knowed about this island an' I steered in this direction as well

as I could, an' by sheer good luck we struck the shore—an' here we are."

"What became of the other boats?"

"Ain't seen nuthin' of 'em yet."

"Is that your boat was split in two, between the rocks in that direction?" and Dave pointed to where such a craft had been found by him and Roger.

"That's her, messmate. Putty badly used up, eh?"

"'And you are quite sure those two passengers had no baggage?" went on our hero, after a pause.

"Nary a thing, messmate, excepting wot they wore. It wasn't no time to think o' baggage, it was a time to think o' what to do to save your life!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE HURRICANE

"WHAT direction did those fellows who ran away take?" asked Dave.

"That's the way they went," answered one of the sailors, pointing to some heavy undergrowth behind the camping-out spot.

"Where does that lead to, do you know?" asked the senator's son.

"Leads to a spring o' fresh water an' half a dozen big caves," was the reply.

"Caves?" queried Dave. "Then perhaps the fellows, who ran away, took to one of the caves."

"Like as not, messmate. Them two chaps have been explorin' them caves ever since we came ashore."

"Let us walk back and have a look," suggested our hero. "We may be able to give Phil and Captain Sanders some assistance."

Without further delay, the two boys left the camp of the castaways and hurried along a small trail through the bushes. They soon came to a rocky depression in the midst of which was a tiny spring.

"That water looks good," exclaimed Dave. "Let us get a drink."

"Perhaps it is poisonous, Dave."

"If it was, I think those sailors would have warned us."

They found the water fairly cold and of a good flavor, and each drank his fill. Then Dave flashed the electric light around. Ahead they made out a series of rocks, with here and there a gloomy opening, leading to unknown depths.

"This is Cave Island and no mistake," was our hero's comment. "The place seems to be fairly honeycombed."

"Be careful that you don't go into a hole and drop out of sight," warned his chum.

They walked to the entrance of one of the caves and peered in. All was dark and silent. Then they went to the next cave. Here they caught a glimmer of light.

"Somebody is moving in here!" exclaimed Dave. "A man with a torch!"

They waited, and presently saw that two persons were approaching slowly, having to pick their way over the uneven rocks.

"They are the captain and Phil," cried Roger, and set up a faint call.

"Hello! Who is that?" answered the captain of the *Golden Eagle*.

"Dave and Roger!" cried Phil. "Oh, say,"

he added, eagerly, " we've seen Jasniff and Merwell! "

" So we suspected," answered Dave. " But you didn't catch them? "

" No, they got away from us," returned Captain Sanders.

" In this cave? " queried Roger.

" Yes."

" But if they are in here, we can get them sooner or later," put in Dave.

" No, my lad. There are several openings to these caves. We found one at the far end, and I reckon those rascals got away through it."

" Did you speak to them at all? " asked our hero.

" Didn't get time," answered Phil. " The minute they saw us they ran like frightened deer."

" Did they have any baggage, Phil? "

" Not that I could see. I rather fancied Jasniff had a small bundle under his coat, but I may have been mistaken."

" The sailors said they came ashore without baggage. Perhaps the jewels went down with the bark."

" Oh, I think they'd make an effort to save such costly gems—anybody would."

" Not if they were thoroughly scared," broke in Captain Sanders. " A person who is thoroughly scared forgets everything but to save his life."

"Then you haven't any idea where they went to?"

"No, lad. But I don't think they'll get off this island in a hurry."

There was nothing to do but to return to where the four sailors were encamped. Then the whole party proceeded to where Billy Dill and Smiley had been left.

"I don't think it will be safe to try to get through those breakers in the darkness," said Captain Sanders. "We may as well make ourselves comfortable until morning. We have plenty of grub on hand, so you fellows shall have your fill," he went on, to the castaways.

The sailors were glad enough to build another campfire, close to the landing-place, and here they were served with all the food and drink they wanted, which put them in good humor. They related the particulars of how the *Emma Brower* had gone down, and of how one boat after another had put off in the storm. It had been a time of great excitement, such as none of them were liable to ever forget.

The boys were worn out from their exertions and willing enough to rest. They fixed up some beds of boughs and were soon in the land of dreams. The sailors rested also, each, however, taking an hour at watching, by orders of Captain Sanders.

It was about five o'clock in the morning when Dave awoke, to find the wind blowing furiously. Two of the sailors were busy stamping out the campfire, for the burning brands were flying in all directions, threatening to set fire to the undergrowth.

"What's this?" he asked of Captain Sanders.

"No telling, lad," was the grave reply. "Looks like a pretty big blow."

"More like a hurricane!" snorted old Billy Dill. "The wind is growin' wuss each minit!"

"Draw that boat up into the bushes and fasten it well," ordered the captain. "We don't want to have it stove in or floated off by the breakers." And the rowboat was carried to a place of safety.

"Where is the ship?" asked Roger.

"Slipped away when the blow came up," answered the captain. "An' I hope the mate knows enough to keep away," he added, gravely.

Soon it started to rain, first a few scattering drops and then a perfect deluge. The castaways spoke of a cave that was near by, and all hurried in that direction, taking the stores from the boat with them.

"How long will this last, do you think?" asked Phil, of the master of the *Golden Eagle*.

"No telling. Maybe only to-day, maybe several days."

"If it last several days, we'll have a time of it getting food," broke in the senator's son.

"We'll watch out for fish and turtles," said Billy Dill. "Nothin' like turtles when you are good an' hungry."

"That's true," answered Dave. He had not forgotten the big turtle the old tar had managed to catch down on one of the islands in the South Seas.

Soon it was raining so hard that but little could be seen beyond the entrance to the cave. The wind moaned and shrieked throughout the cavern, which happened to have several entrances. Once it became so strong that it almost lifted the boys from their feet. The rain drove in at times, and they had to get into a split in the rocks to keep dry.

"Hark! what was that?" cried Roger, during a lull in the wind.

"I heard thunder; that's all," answered Phil.

"I think a tree must have been struck by lightning," answered Captain Sanders. "The lightning is getting pretty fierce," he added, as a brilliant illumination filled the cavern.

"Wonder where Jasniff and Merwell are?" whispered Phil, to his chums, "I'll wager this storm scares 'em half to death."

"Yes, and those four Englishmen," added Dave. "Don't forget that they were coming to this island."

Slowly the hours of the morning dragged by. There was no let-up in the hurricane, for such it really proved to be. The wind blew strongly all the time, but occasionally would come a heavy blast that fairly made the island tremble. The lightning had died away somewhat, but now and then would come a great flash, followed by a crash and rumble that would echo and reëcho among the rocks.

"Just look at the ocean!" cried Dave, as he and his chums walked to one corner of the entrance to gaze out.

"The waves seem to be mountain-high," returned Phil. "You wouldn't think it possible a ship could live on such a sea."

"Well, it is mighty dangerous, Phil; you know that as well as I do."

"I hope the *Golden Eagle* weathers the storm."

"We all hope that."

Dinner was a rather scanty meal, cooked with great difficulty in a hollow of the rocks. The smoke from the fire rolled and swirled in all directions, nearly blinding everybody. But the repast was better than nothing, and nobody grumbled.

By nightfall the rain ceased. But the wind was almost as strong as ever, and when those in the cave ventured outside they had to be on guard,

for fear a flying tree-branch would come down on their heads.

Captain Sanders was much worried over the safety of his vessel, but he did not let on to the boys, since it would have done no good. But the lads understood, and they, too, were more or less alarmed, remembering the fate that had overtaken the *Emma Brower* in a storm that had been no worse than the present one.

With so much rain driving in, the cave was a damp place, and the boys were glad enough to go outside. They looked for wood that might be easily dried, and after much difficulty, succeeded in starting up a new campfire, around which the whole crowd gathered.

"I'm goin' to try my luck along shore," said Billy Dill, and started off with Dave, Phil, and Roger, to see if any fish or turtles could be located. They found the shore strewn with wreckage.

"Oh, Billy, can this be from our ship?" exclaimed Phil, in alarm.

"I don't think so, lad. Looks to me like it had been in the water some days. I reckon it's from the *Emma Brower,* or some other craft."

In the wreckage they found the remains of several boxes and barrels. But the contents had become water-soaked or had sunk to the bottom of the sea; so there was nothing in the shape of food for them. They also came across the main-

mast of the bark, with some of the stays still dragging around it.

"That will do for a pole, in case we wish to hoist a flag," suggested the senator's son.

They found neither fish nor turtles, and at last had to return to the campfire disappointed. There was next to nothing to eat for supper.

"Well, better luck in the morning," said Captain Sanders, with an air of cheerfulness he did not feel. "As soon as this wind dies down our ship will come back, and then we'll have all we want to eat."

It was a long, dreary night that followed, and the boys were glad to behold the sun come up brightly in the morning. Dave was the first up, but his chums quickly followed, and all went down to the beach, to look for fish and also to see if the *Golden Eagle* was anywhere in sight.

This time they had better luck, so far as food was concerned. In a hollow they found over a score of fish that had been cast from the ocean by the breakers, and they also found a fine turtle that was pinned down by a fallen tree.

"That's a new way to catch a turtle," remarked Dave. "It's a regular trap."

"Turtle soup, yum! yum!" murmured Phil.

"And broiled fish,—all you want, too!" added Roger, smacking his lips.

When they got back to the camp they found that

the fire had been renewed, and soon the appetizing odor of broiling fish filled the air. Then Captain Sanders and one of the castaway sailors came in from a walk in another direction, carrying an air-tight canister, which, on being opened, was found to contain fancy crackers.

"There is a good deal of wreckage down on the beach," said the captain. "We'll inspect it after breakfast."

Having eaten their fill of the fish and the crackers, and leaving Billy Dill and some of the others busy making turtle soup, the boys and Captain Sanders took another walk along the beach, to look over the wreckage and also see if they could sight the *Golden Eagle,* or locate Jasniff or Merwell.

"I hope we can find those two fellows," said Dave. "I can stand this suspense no longer. I must know what has become of those jewels!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

A HALF-MILE was covered when, on turning a point of rocks, the boys and the captain came to a sandy cove. Here was more of the wreckage, and the whole party ran down to the beach to investigate.

Boxes, barrels, and bits of timber were strewn from one end of the cove to the other, and in the mass were a number of things of more or less value—timber, food, and some clothing. There was also a trunk, but it was open and empty.

"Look!" cried Dave, suddenly, and pointed to a small, black leather case, that rested on some of the wreckage.

"What is it?" queried Phil and Roger, in a breath.

Dave did not reply, for he was crawling over the wreckage with care. Soon he reached the spot where the black leather case rested, caught on a nail, and he picked it up. The clasp was undone and the case fell open, revealing the interior, which was lined with white plush.

"Empty!" murmured Dave, sadly. "Empty!"

There was a groan in his voice as he uttered the word.

"What is it, Dave?" asked the senator's son, although he and Phil guessed the truth.

"It's the Carwith jewel-case," was the answer. "The very case that Mr. Carwith left with Mr. Wadsworth!"

"Are you certain?" demanded Phil.

"Yes, for here is the name, 'Ridgewood Osgood Carwith,' stamped in gold on the top."

"And empty," murmured the captain. "This looks bad," and he shook his head, thoughtfully.

"Maybe Jasniff and Merwell took the jewels from the case," suggested Roger, hopefully.

"It is possible, Roger. But—but—I am afraid the jewels are at the bottom of the ocean," answered Dave, and his face showed how downcast he felt.

"They might have taken the jewels and divided them between themselves," said Phil. "Maybe they put them in money-belts, or something like that. They might think that the sailors would rob them, if they saw the case."

"It's possible, Phil, and I hope you are right," answered our hero. But in his heart he was still afraid that the gems had gone to the bottom of the Atlantic.

"I think we had better climb to the top of

yonder rise and take a look around the island," said the captain. "For all we know, the *Golden Eagle* may be on the other side. I sincerely hope she has weathered the storm."

Placing the jewel-case in a safe place between the rocks, the party commenced to climb the rise of ground the captain had pointed out. This was no easy task, since the rocks were rough and there were many openings, leading to the caves below.

"We don't want another tumble," remarked Roger to Dave.

"Hardly, Roger; once was enough."

The sun had come out strongly, consequently the water was drying away rapidly. It was very warm, and the boys were glad that they had donned thin clothing on leaving the ship.

At last they reached the top of the rise and from that elevation were able to see all but the southern end of Cave Island, which was hidden by a growth of palms.

Not a ship of any kind was in sight, much to the captain's disappointment.

"Must have had to sail away a good many miles," said Dave.

"Either that, lad, or else the storm caused more or less trouble."

From the elevation, all took a good look at every part of the island that could be seen. They

saw several other rocky elevations and the entrances to caves innumerable.

"Tell you one thing," remarked Phil. "If there was any truth in that story of a pirates' treasure, the pirates would have plenty of places where to hide the hoard."

"Humph! I don't believe in the treasure and never will," returned Roger. "If the treasure was ever here, you can make up your mind that somebody got hold of it long before this."

"If those Englishmen came here, it is queer that we don't see some trace of them," said Captain Sanders.

"Maybe they are like Jasniff and Merwell, keeping out of sight," ventured Dave.

"That may be true."

"I think I see some figures moving down near the shore over there," continued Roger, after another look around. "But they are so far off I am not sure. They may be animals."

"They look like two men to me," exclaimed Dave, after a long look. "What if they should be Jasniff and Merwell! Oh, let us walk there and make sure!"

"That's a good, stiff walk," answered Captain Sanders. "We can't go from here very well—unless we want to climb over some rough rocks. It would be better to go down and follow the shore."

"Then let us do that. It won't do us any good to go back to where we left the others, now the ship isn't in sight."

But the captain demurred, and finally it was agreed to return to camp and start out for the other side of the island directly after dinner.

"Turtle soup for all hands!" announced Billy Dill, proudly. "Best ever made, too."

"It certainly smells good," answered Dave.

The turtle soup proved both palatable and nourishing, and, eaten with crackers, made a good meal.

"We'll take some crackers and fish along," said the captain, to the boys, when they were preparing to leave the camp again. "For there is no telling how soon we'll get back. It may take us longer than we think to reach the other side of this island."

"I've got a knapsack," said one of the castaway sailors. "You can take that along, filled," and so it was arranged. Dave carried his gun and the captain had a pistol.

"If there is any game, we'll have a try for it," said Dave. "Even a few plump birds would make fine eating."

"Yes, or a rabbit or hare," added Roger.

The party walked along the shore as far as they could go and then, coming to what appeared to be an old trail, took to that.

"What do you make of this path?" said Dave. "I had an idea the island was uninhabited."

"It is supposed to be," answered Captain Sanders. "But there is no reason why somebody shouldn't live here."

Presently they came to a fine spring of water. Near by lay an old rusty cup, and a little further on a broken bucket.

"Somebody has been here and that recently," was Dave's comment. "I hope we are on the trail of Merwell and Jasniff."

They walked on a little further and then, of a sudden, Captain Sanders halted the boys and pointed up into one of the trees.

"Wild pigeons!" exclaimed Dave. "And hundreds of them! Shall I give them a couple of barrels, captain?"

"Might as well, lad. Wild pigeons are good eating, especially when you are hungry. Get as many of 'em as you can."

Dave approached a little closer and took aim with care. Bang! went the shotgun, and a wild fluttering and flying followed. Bang! went the second barrel of the weapon, and then, as the smoke cleared away, the boys and the captain saw seven of the pigeons come down to the ground. Several others fluttered around and Phil caught one and wrung its neck, and Roger laid another low with a stick he had picked up.

"Fine shots, both of them," declared Captain Sanders. "Now load up again, Dave, so as to be ready for anything else that shows up."

"I am afraid I have scared the rest of the game," declared our hero, and so it proved, for after that they saw nothing but some small birds.

They passed through a thick woods and then came rather unexpectedly to a wall of rocks, all of a hundred feet in height. At the base of the wall was an opening leading into a broad cave. Near the entrance was the remains of a camp-fire.

"Somebody has been here and that recently!" cried Phil, as he examined the embers.

"Must be Merwell and Jasniff!" cried Dave. "For if they were strangers they would come out and see what the shooting meant."

"Shall we go into the cave, or continue on the way to the shore?" questioned the senator's son.

"Oh, let us take a peep into the cave first," cried Phil. "It looks as if it was inhabited."

The others were willing, and lighting a fire-brand that was handy, they entered the cavern. In front they found the opening to be broad and low, but in the rear the ceiling was much higher and there were several passageways leading in as many different directions.

"What an island!" murmured Roger. "Why, one could spend a year in visiting all the caves!"

"It's like a great, big sponge!" returned Phil. "Holes everywhere!"

"Take care that you don't slip down into some opening!" warned Captain Sanders.

In one of the passages they came across the remains of a meal and also some empty bottles. Then Dave saw some bits of paper strewn over the rocky floor.

"What are they, Phil?" he asked, and then both commenced to pick the pieces up. Roger helped, while the captain held the firebrand.

"Well, of all things!" cried the shipowner's son. "Now what do you make of this?"

"The chart!" cried Dave.

"Yes!"

"What chart?" queried the master of the *Golden Eagle.*

"The treasure chart those four Englishmen had," answered Dave. "Now what made them come here with it and tear it to pieces?"

"Hum!" mused the captain. "One of two things would make 'em do that, lad. Either they got the treasure and had no further use for the map, or else they found the whole thing was a fake and in their rage they tore the map to shreds."

"They must have gotten the gold!" murmured Roger and Phil.

"No, I think they got fooled," said Dave.

"The question is, If those Britishers were here, where did they go to?" asked the captain.

"Let us call," suggested Dave. "They may be in some part of this cave where they couldn't hear the shots from my gun."

All called out several times, and listened intently for a reply.

"Hark! I hear something!" cried Roger. "Listen!"

They strained their ears, and from what appeared to be a great distance they heard a human voice. But what was said they could not make out.

"Too many echoes here," declared the captain. "A fellow can't tell where the cry comes from."

"Well, let us investigate," said our hero.

They moved forward and backward, up one passageway and down another, calling and listening. At times the voice seemed to be quite close, then it sounded further off than ever.

"This sure is a mystery!" declared Phil. "What do you make of it, Dave?"

"I am beginning to think the call came from somewhere overhead," answered our hero. "Captain, see if you can flash a light on those rocks to the left of our heads."

Captain Sanders did as requested, and presently all in the party saw another passageway, leading up from a series of rocks that formed something

of a natural stairway. Up this they went, Dave leading the van. Then they came to a small opening between two rocks.

"Help! help!" came in a half-smothered voice. "Help, please. Don't leave me here in the dark any longer!"

CHAPTER XXIV

JASNIFF AND MERWELL

"It's a man!"

"One of the Englishmen!"

"You are right, lads," came from Captain Sanders. "And see, he is bound hands and feet to the rocks!"

What the master of the *Golden Eagle* said was true, and as the firebrand was flashed on the scene, the chums could do little but stare in astonishment.

Lying on his back between the rocks was the Englishman named Giles Borden. Hands and feet were bound with a strong cord, which ran around a projection of the rocks in such a manner that the prisoner could scarcely move.

"Who tied you up?" questioned Dave, as he and Phil set to work to liberate the prisoner.

"Geswick, Pardell, and Rumney," groaned the prisoner. "Oh, if only I had my hands on them!"

"Why did they do it?" asked Captain Sanders.

"They wanted to rob me—and they did rob me!" answered Giles Borden. "Oh, help me out of this wretched hole and give me a drink of water! I am dying from thirst!"

Not without difficulty the man was freed of the rope and helped to get out from between the rocks. Then Dave and Roger half carried him down to the cave proper. The crowd had a canteen of water and the man drank, eagerly.

"So your friends robbed you?" said Captain Sanders, curiously.

"Do not call them friends of mine!" returned Giles Borden. "They are not friends—they are vipers, wolves! Oh, if ever I meet them again at home I'll soon have them in prison, or know the reason why!"

"Hadn't you better tell us all about it?" went on the master of the *Golden Eagle*.

"Wait a minute!" cried Dave. "Do you suppose those men are anywhere near here?"

"I don't know. They said they would be back, but they did not come."

"They may have seen us and skipped out," ventured the senator's son.

"More than likely," groaned Giles Borden. "Now that they have my money they won't want to stay here. They'll take passage on that ship as soon as she comes in and leave me to shift for myself."

"Tell us your story, so we can understand what you are talking about," said Captain Sanders.

In a disconnected manner the Englishman related his tale, pausing occasionally to take another

drink of water. He said he was from London and had met Geswick, Pardell, and Rumney less than six months before. They had come to him with the story of a wonderful pirates' treasure said to be hidden on Cave Island, and had asked him to finance an expedition in search of it.

" I had just fallen heir to five thousand pounds through the death of my father," he went on, " and I was anxious to get the treasure, so I consented to pay the expenses of the trip, taking the three men along. They had the chart that you saw on shipboard and some other particulars, and they made me bring along a thousand pounds extra, stating that we might have to pay some natives well to get them to show us where the particular cave we were seeking was located."

Then had followed the trip to Florida and the one to Barbados. At the latter island a schooner had been chartered to take them to Cave Island, where they were landed on the eastern shore. The schooner was to come back for the Englishmen a week later.

" As soon as the treasure hunt began I suspected that I was being hoaxed," continued Giles Borden. " For all I knew, we were alone on the island. We found several huts, but they were all deserted. We visited a score of caves, but saw nothing that looked like a treasure. Then, one afternoon, Geswick asked me about the extra thousand pounds

I was carrying. I grew suspicious and tried to hide the money between the rocks. The three caught me at it and pounced on the money like a pack of wolves. Then, when I remonstrated, they laughed at me, and told me to keep quiet, that they were going to run matters to suit themselves."

"They must have intended to rob you from the start," said Dave.

"You are right, and I was a fool to trust them. As soon as they had my money, one of them, Rumney, tore up the chart and threw the pieces in my face. That angered me so greatly that I struck him with my fist, knocking him down. Then the three leaped on me and made me a prisoner, binding me with the rope. I tried my best to get away, but could not. That was at night. In the morning they went off, saying they would come back later and give me something to eat. But that is the last I have seen or heard of them."

"If we hadn't found you, you might have starved to death," murmured Captain Sanders. "They ought to be punished heavily for this—and for robbing you!"

The Englishman was glad enough to get something to eat, and then said he felt much stronger.

"But what brings you to this island?" he questioned, while partaking of the food.

"We are after a pair of criminals," answered Dave, as the others looked at him, not knowing

what to say. "Two young fellows who ran away with some valuable jewels. I suppose you saw nothing of them."

"No, as I said before, we saw nobody."

"They are on this island."

"Then I hope you catch them. And I hope you'll aid me in catching those other scamps."

"We'll certainly do that," answered Captain Sanders.

A little later the whole party left the cave, and Giles Borden pointed out a number of other caves he had visited.

"The island is full of them," declared the Englishman. "And one has to be careful, for fear of falling into a hole at every step."

The middle of the afternoon found the party once more at the water's edge. They had seen no trace of Jasniff and Merwell, or of the rascally Englishmen. All were tired out and content to rest for a little while.

"Looks like a wild goose chase, doesn't it, Dave?" remarked Roger.

"Oh, you mustn't grow discouraged so quickly, Roger," was Dave's answer. "Unless Jasniff and Merwell have a chance to leave this island we'll be sure to locate them, sooner or later. What I am worried about mostly is the question: Have they the jewels or did the gems go to the bottom of the ocean?"

"Yes, that's the most important question of all."

"It will be poor consolation to catch Jasniff and Merwell and not get the jewels," put in Phil. "I reckon, Dave, you'd rather have it the other way around—get the jewels and miss Jasniff and Merwell."

"Indeed, yes, Phil."

"In case we don't——" began the senator's son, and then stopped short. He had seen Captain Sanders leap up and start inland.

"What did you see, Captain?" asked Dave.

"I saw somebody looking at us, from behind yonder trees!" cried the master of the *Golden Eagle*.

"One of the Englishmen?" queried Phil.

"No, it was somebody younger—looked a little like that picture of Link Merwell!"

"Come on—after them!" cried Dave, and started on a run in the direction the captain indicated.

All were soon on the way, climbing over some rough rocks at first and then crashing through the heavy undergrowth. Then they entered a forest of tropical trees and vines.

"I see them!" exclaimed Dave, after several hundred feet had been covered. "Jasniff and Merwell as sure as you live! Stop! Stop, I tell you!" he called out.

"You keep back, Dave Porter!" yelled Nick

Jasniff in return. "Keep back, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Jasniff, you had better surrender!" cried Roger.

"We'll be sure to get you sooner or later!" added Phil.

"You'll never catch me!" answered the other. "Now keep back, or maybe somebody will get shot."

"Do you think he'll shoot?" asked Captain Sanders, in some alarm, while Giles Borden stopped short.

"Possibly," answered Dave. "But I am going after him anyway," he added sturdily. "I came here to catch those rascals and I am going to do it."

"And I am with you," said Phil, promptly.

"Scare 'em with your gun, Dave," suggested the senator's son.

"I will," was our hero's reply, and he brought the weapon to the front. "I've got a gun, Jasniff!" he called out. "You had better stop! And you had better stop too, Merwell!"

"Don't yo-you shoot at us!" screamed Link Merwell, in sudden terror. And then he ran with all speed for the nearest trees and dove out of sight. The next instant Jasniff disappeared, likewise.

Dave was now thoroughly aroused, and he re-

solved to do his best to run the rascals down and corner them. Shifting his shotgun once more to his back, he ran on in the direction the pair had taken, and Roger, Phil, and the captain and the Englishman followed.

Listening occasionally, they could hear Jasniff and Merwell crashing through the undergrowth and at the same time calling to each other. Evidently they had become separated and were trying to get together again.

As they advanced into the forest, Dave caught sight of Merwell. He was behind a low fringe of bushes and an instant later disappeared.

"Stop, Merwell!" he called out. "It won't do you any good to run. We are bound to catch you, sooner or later."

"Yo-you let me alone, Dave Porter!" spluttered Merwell. He was almost out of breath, so violent had been his exertions.

Dave kept on and soon reached the low bushes. Then he saw Merwell again, this time leaping for some brushwood between two tall rocks.

"I've got you now!" he said, sharply. "You may as well give in!"

"Oh, Porter, please let me——" commenced Link Merwell, and then Dave's hand caught him by the shoulder and whirled him about.

As this happened something else occurred that

filled both pursued and pursuer with alarm. The grass and brushwood under their feet began to give way. Then of a sudden Link Merwell sank from sight, and Dave disappeared after him!

In the meanwhile Phil and the others kept on in the direction Nick Jasniff had taken. Twice they caught sight of the former bully of Oak Hall, but each time he was further away than before.

"You'll not catch me!" cried Jasniff. "You might as well give up trying." Then he dove into another section of the forest and they saw no more of him.

"What has become of Dave?" asked Phil, when he and Roger came together, a little later.

"I thought he was with you, Phil."

"And I thought he was with you."

"He went after that other chap," put in Captain Sanders. "Perhaps he caught him. They were over in that direction," and the captain pointed with his hand.

All proceeded in the direction indicated. But they did not catch sight of either Dave or Merwell.

"Well, this is strange, to say the least," remarked Phil, after they had called out several times. "What do you make of it, Roger?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Phil. They can't

have gotten so far away but what they could hear us call."

"Maybe they fell into one of the caves," suggested Captain Sanders.

"If they have, we had better hunt for Dave at once," returned Roger.

CHAPTER XXV

LINK MERWELL'S STORY

DOWN and down and still down went Dave, with Link Merwell in front of him. Daylight was left behind with a suddenness that was appalling. The brushwood scratched our hero's face and he could not repress a cry of alarm. Merwell screamed loud and long and an echo came back that was weird and ghostlike. Then came a mighty splash, and both boys went into the water over their heads.

Dave was a good swimmer, and as soon as he entered the water he struck out to save himself. He came up in almost utter darkness, so he had to go it blindly, not knowing in what direction to turn. Then he heard a wild spluttering and knew the sounds came from his enemy.

"Merwell!"

"Oh, Porter! Sa-save me, please!" gasped Link Merwell.

"Why don't you swim?—that is what I am doing."

"I—I—struck my head on a rock! Oh, save

me!" And then came a gasp, and the scamp disappeared under the surface.

Dave was close by and knew the direction by the noise. Taking a few strokes, he bumped into Merwell, who promptly tried to catch his would-be rescuer by the throat. But our hero was on guard and turned him around.

"Keep quiet, or I'll let go!" he ordered, as he began to tread water. As Merwell obeyed, Dave struck out to where he saw a faint streak of light. He made out a shelving rock, and after some difficulty, reached this. Here the water was only up to his waist, and he waded along, half carrying his enemy, until they reached another series of rocks, where both crawled up to a spot that was dry. From somewhere overhead came a faint streak of light, testifying to the fact that there was an opening beyond, even if it could not be seen.

"Oh, my head!" murmured Link Merwell, and put up one hand to a lump that was rising on his forehead.

"I got struck myself," said Dave. "But it didn't amount to much. I told you to stop. If you had done so, we wouldn't have gotten into this pickle."

"Whe-where are we?" asked Merwell, and there was a shiver in his tone.

"Down at the bottom of that hole." Dave

tried to pierce the darkness. "Looks like some underground river to me."

"The water is salt."

"Then this place must connect with the ocean." Dave drew a deep breath. "Merwell, tell me truthfully, what did you do with those jewels?" he questioned, eagerly. Even in that time of peril he could not forget the mission that had brought him to Cave Island.

"Who—who said I had the jewels?" faltered the other.

"I know you and Jasniff took them—it is useless for you to deny it."

"How do you know that?"

"Never mind now. Answer my question. Have you the jewels, or did you give them to Jasniff?"

"I didn't give Nick anything."

"Then you have them."

"How do you know?"

"I am not here to answer questions, Link Merwell. I want to know what you did with the jewels." Dave's voice grew stern. "Answer me at once!" And he caught Merwell by the arm.

"Don't—don't shove me into the water!" cried the scamp, in alarm, although Dave had no intention of doing as he imagined. "I—I—we—er—we divided the jewels between us. But Nick got the best of them."

"And what did you do with your share?"

"I'll—er—I'll tell you when we get out of this hole."

"You'll tell me right now, Merwell!" And again Dave caught the culprit by the arm.

"I—I put my share of the jewels in my money-belt," he faltered.

"Have you it on now?"

"Yes. But Nick has the best of the jewels—I got only the little ones," went on Link Merwell, half-angrily. It was easy to surmise that he and Jasniff had not gotten along well together.

"How is it Jasniff got the best of them?"

"He had the jewel-case when we were about to leave the bark during the storm. Everybody was excited, and he said we couldn't carry the case—that it wouldn't be safe, for we might drop it and all of the jewels would be lost. He said we had better divide them and put them in our belts. We had bought belts for that purpose in Jacksonville. So we took the jewels out of the case and threw the box away. I thought I had my share, but after we got to this island, and I had a chance to look, I saw he had the lion's share, about three-quarters, in fact, and all the big ones."

"And he has them now?"

"Yes,—that is, he did have them just before we saw you."

"Did you sell or pawn any of the jewels?"

"Only a few small ones. We were afraid to offer the big ones, so soon after the—well, you know," and Link Merwell stopped short, looking everything but happy.

"You mean so soon after the robbery," said Dave, bluntly.

"Yes."

"Link, whatever—but never mind that now," continued our hero, hastily. "Hand over the money-belt."

"What, now?"

"Yes, at once. I'll not trust you to carry those jewels a minute longer."

"Can't you wait till we get out of this wretched hole?"

"I might, but I am not going to. Hand it over and be careful that none of the jewels are lost. Your father may have to pay for the others."

With fingers that trembled from fear and chilliness, Link Merwell slipped his hands under the light clothing he wore and took off the money-belt that encircled his waist.

"There is some money there that belongs to me," he began, hesitatingly.

"You'll get back what is yours, never fear," answered Dave, and took the belt. He saw to it that it was tightly closed, then fastened it around his own waist.

"Remember, Nick has the best of the jewels," went on Merwell, rather spitefully.

"I am not likely to forget it," answered Dave, grimly. "Now, the sooner we get out of this hole the better."

Merwell was just as anxious to see daylight, even if he was to be held a prisoner, and together the boys hunted around for some exit from the underground watercourse. But the only way out seemed to be far overhead, and to climb up the smooth, sloping rocks proved impossible.

"Oh, what shall we do?" groaned Merwell, after they had attempted to climb up and had failed. "We are caught like rats in a trap!"

"Perhaps we'll have to swim for it," answered Dave. "This water is very salt, which proves it comes from the ocean. Moreover, it is gradually going down, showing it is affected by the tide. Let us follow the stream for a short distance and see where it leads to."

Merwell demurred, but he did not want to remain behind alone in the semi-darkness, so he followed Dave, and both waded and swam a distance of several hundred feet. Here the underground river made a turn around the rocks, and both boys were delighted to see a streak of sunlight resting on the water.

"An opening of some sort!" cried our hero.

"Come on!" And he swam on boldly and Merwell followed as quickly as he could.

Soon the pair reached a break in the cave. On either side were walls of rocks, uneven and covered with scanty bushes and immense trailing vines. The opening was about a hundred feet in length, and beyond it the stream of salty water plunged into another cavern, undoubtedly on its way to the ocean.

"Well, we are out of the cave in one way but not in another," observed Dave, as he stood on the dry rocks and gazed about. "It's going to be a stiff climb to get out of here."

"Ca-can't you wait till I—I get my breath," panted Merwell.

"Yes, for I want to get my own breath back. Perhaps we'll have to go through that next cave to get out," he continued, after a pause.

"Oh, I hope not! I hate it underground!" And Merwell shivered. "Besides, it's cold," he went on, to cover up the tremor in his voice.

"Yes, it is cold," returned Dave, shortly.

He sat down to rest, and Merwell followed suit. On all sides were the rocky walls and trailing vines, while at their feet ran the silent, mysterious stream of salty water.

Dave looked at the walls and the stream, and then looked at Merwell. The face of the other

youth was a study. He was downcast to the last degree.

"Link, what made you do it?" he asked, in a voice that was not unkindly.

"I didn't do it—that is, it wasn't my plan!" burst out the culprit, passionately. "Oh, I know they'll hold me for it, just the same as they'll hold Nick, if they catch him! But I'll tell you honestly, Dave, it wasn't any of my planning. I'm bad, and I know it, but I am not as bad as that. It was Nick who got the whole thing up. You know how mad he has been at you ever since he had to leave Oak Hall. Well, it was his plan to make you a prisoner first and then make it look as if you had robbed the jewelry works. You ask Doctor Montgomery if that isn't so. Well, the first part of the plan fell through, for you got away. Then he got me to go to Crumville, and found out where we could get the dynamite. I got scared then and wanted to back out, but he said if I did he'd throw all the blame on me, and so I stuck to him. I wish I hadn't done it," concluded Merwell, bitterly.

"Did you go direct to Jacksonville after the robbery?"

"No, we went to Washington first and there we pawned one diamond for sixty dollars. Then we went to Jacksonville. There we met Luke Watson, and both of us got scared to death. We

had paid for our passage on the *Emma Brower,* and we kept out of sight till the bark sailed. After the storm we landed here with those four sailors, and were waiting to sight some passing ship when you and your crowd turned up."

"What were you going to do at Barbados?"

"Keep quiet until this affair blew over and then take some English vessel for England. There, Jasniff said, he could get a certain pawnbroker to take the jewels and give us a good price for them. You'll remember, he was in England some time."

"Yes, I met him there. But, Link, didn't you realize what a crime you were committing?" went on Dave, earnestly.

"I did—after it was too late. Many a time I wanted to back out, but Nick wouldn't let me. We had a quarrel in Washington, and another in Jacksonville, and on the ship I came close to exposing him to the captain. I think I should have done it, only the hurricane came up, and then we had to hustle to save our lives."

A silence followed, for each of the boys was busy with his thoughts. Dave felt sorry for his former schoolmate, but he knew Merwell thoroughly, and knew that the fellow was more sorry because he was caught than because he had committed a great wrong. He belonged to the class of persons who are willing to repent when it is too late.

The day was drawing to a close, and already the sunlight had disappeared beyond the high rocks. With a deep sigh Dave arose to his feet and stretched himself, and Merwell followed suit.

"What are you going to do?" asked the former bully of Oak Hall.

"I am going to try to climb up those rocks."

"They are terribly steep!"

"I know it, but those vines look strong and we can use them as ropes, Link. But you need not try it, if you don't want to."

"Oh, if you try, so will I, Dave."

After that but little was said, both lads saving their breath for the task before them. Dave went up first, testing each vine with care as he advanced. Twice he slipped back, and once Merwell came to his aid and held him. It was a little thing to do, but it pleased our hero, and his face showed it.

At last they were out of the hollow and each threw himself on the ground to rest. Then Dave walked to a near-by hill and gazed in every direction. Not a human being was in sight anywhere.

"Well, we've got to find them somehow," he said to Merwell. "Come ahead." And side by side they set off through the forest in the fast-gathering darkness.

DAVE WENT UP FIRST, TESTING EACH VINE WITH CARE.—*Page 246.*

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COLUMN OF SMOKE

"WELL, we are lost, that is all there is to it. And I am so dead tired I can't walk another step." And thus speaking, Link Merwell sank down on a tree-root to rest.

He and Dave had been plunging along through the forest and across several clearings for the larger part of an hour. They had found what looked to be a trail, but it had suddenly come to an end in front of a small cave that looked to be the lair of some wild animal, and they had gone on once more. Now the darkness of the tropics shut out the surrounding landscape.

Link Merwell certainly looked the picture of misery. His clothing was much tattered and still wet, and his forehead was swollen from contact with the rocks. One of his shoes was so cut that his bare foot was exposed.

"It looks as if we were lost," replied Dave. "In this darkness it will be difficult to go much further. But I had hoped, by keeping in a straight line, that, sooner or later, we'd reach the shore of the island."

"I reckon we didn't walk in a straight line—most folks that get lost in a woods don't."

"You are right in that, but I kept as straight as I could, Link. However, that is neither here nor there. If we have got to stay here all night we may as well try to make ourselves comfortable. But I wish the others knew I was safe."

"Can't you fire your gun? It ought to be dry by now."

"I'll try it."

Dave sat down and commenced to work over the fowling-piece. In a few minutes he tried it. Bang! went the gun, the shot echoing far and wide through the forest and among the rocks. Then both boys listened for a reply.

"Nothing doing," muttered Merwell, after a minute of utter silence.

"I am sure the others would fire a shot in return if they heard that," said Dave. "We must be further from them than I expected. Well, I don't see what we can do excepting to try to make ourselves comfortable. We might climb one of these tall palms and take a look around."

"Yes, that's it!" exclaimed the other youth, eagerly. "Why didn't we think of that before? But it will be hard work climbing one of those trees," went on Merwell, gazing up at the straight trunk with the first of the limbs many feet above their heads.

"I'll do it native fashion," answered Dave.

He had seen the natives of the South Sea Islands climb tall trees by means of a vine-rope cast about the waist and the tree-trunk. Selecting several strong vines, he twisted them into a rope, and then passed the same around a tree-trunk and to the back of his waist. Then he took off his shoes and stockings and placed his bare feet against the tree. By "hiking" the rope a few inches at a time, he was able to "walk up the tree" with comparative ease.

As soon as the branches were reached, Dave discarded the rope and went up as far as the strength of the tree would permit. He was now close enough to the top to get a good look around, and he cast his eyes about eagerly, hoping to catch sight of some of his friends, or their campfire.

"See anything?" called up Merwell, eagerly.

"Not yet," answered Dave, and then he turned around in the tree-top. He now made out the rolling sea.

"I see a light!" he cried.

"A campfire?" queried the youth below.

"No, it is on the water. I think it must be a light on a ship."

"What kind of a ship?"

"A sailing vessel of some sort," answered Dave, and he wondered if it could be the *Golden Eagle,* coming back after the storm.

"Maybe it's the ship that was coming back for those Englishmen," went on Merwell, for Dave had told him about the men. He heaved a mountainous sigh as he realized how affairs had turned against him. For a moment he thought of running away and trying to find Jasniff, but then the darkness and loneliness of the forest appalled him. He felt that he would rather be a prisoner than be alone in such a spot.

Dave watched the waving light for some time, as it rose and fell on the bosom of the ocean, but could learn nothing concerning the craft that showed it. Then he continued to look around the island. No campfire was to be located, and finally he rejoined Merwell.

"The light on that ship was all I saw," he said. "Perhaps it might pay to walk down to the shore in that direction. But it is a long distance, and in the darkness we might fall into another of the caves."

"Let us stay here," answered Merwell.

"It will probably be as well. We can build a campfire and dry our clothing and then go to bed."

"Wish I had something to eat," grumbled the lad who had been caught.

"So do I, Link. But we haven't anything, so we'll have to make the best of it. Try to find some firewood. Luckily I have a waterproof

matchsafe along and it is full of matches," added our hero.

Fate was kinder to them than they had expected, for in hunting for firewood, Merwell found a hole containing what they took to be native hares. He killed two of the creatures, and at once set to work to clean and skin them. Then, when Dave had started the fire, the game was broiled while the boys had their clothing drying.

"Not much of a meal, but better than nothing," said Merwell, and our hero agreed with him. They found some water in a hollow of the rocks, left there by the hurricane, and had a drink, after which both lay down to rest.

"Don't you think we ought to stand guard?" asked the big youth.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Dave. "I am dead tired and so are you, and I don't think anybody will come to harm us,—and there are no large wild beasts on the island. I guess we can take a chance," and as soon as their clothing was dry, both turned in, on beds of vines and moss.

In the morning Merwell was the first to stir, and when Dave awoke he found the campfire burning merrily. The big youth was nowhere to be seen.

"Can he have run away?" mused our hero, and quickly felt to learn if the money-belt with the

jewels was safe. It was still in its place and he breathed a sigh of relief. Then he gave a call.

"Coming!" came from a distance, and in a few minutes Merwell put in an appearance, bringing with him some berries and fruits.

"One of those sailors who came ashore with me told me about these," he said. "The berries we can eat raw and they are very good. The fruit we can slice up and toast. They make a pretty decent meal," and so it proved, and both youths ate their fill. Then Dave announced his intention of climbing the tree again and having another look around.

"That ship is at the south end of the island," he announced. "It is not the *Golden Eagle,* but a much smaller craft. Most likely it is the vessel the Englishmen engaged. If it is, those three rascals will have a chance to get away before Giles Borden can catch them and make them give up the money they took from him."

"Oh, Dave, do you think——" And then Merwell stopped short.

"What were you going to say, Link?"

"I was thinking if it would be possible for Nick to go away with those Englishmen."

"Why, yes, if he chanced to meet them, and they were willing to have him. But would he go and leave you behind?"

"He might, especially if he found out I was

captured, or that I had let you have what jewels I was carrying."

"If he went with those Englishmen he would be foolish to let them know about the jewels, for they would rob him, just as they robbed Giles Borden," continued our hero, and then he realized that here was a new peril to face. If the Englishmen got their hands on the jewels it might be next to impossible to recover the gems, especially if the rascals managed to get away from Cave Island.

Presently our hero saw a column of smoke arising in another portion of the island. He watched it for several minutes and then gave a cry of satisfaction.

"I know where they are!"

"You mean your crowd?" queried Merwell.

"Yes. Phil is signaling to me, by means of a column of smoke such as some Indians out west use. We learned the trick when we were at Star Ranch. Come on, we'll soon be with them. It isn't very far."

Dave had come down from his high perch in a hurry, and in a very short time was ready to leave the spot. Merwell gave a deep sigh, for he did not relish confronting his former schoolmates.

"It's tough luck, but I suppose I've got to stand it," he murmured, as he followed Dave, after

the fire had been extinguished. "When a fellow makes a fool of himself he's got to take the consequences." And this remark was so true that Dave did not dispute it.

On they went through the forest and then over a rocky hill. Three times they came close to falling into the treacherous holes in which the island abounded, and the last time poor Merwell got a fall that almost sprained his ankle.

"We'll rest a bit and you can bathe the ankle," said Dave, kindly, and got some water from a nearby pool.

"I don't wonder nobody is living on this island," grumbled the injured one. "I suppose the natives around here are too afraid of falling into some of those holes."

"They are afraid of the caves and also afraid of volcanoes," answered Dave. "The mate of the *Golden Eagle* told me that. Sometimes the volcanoes break out here without warning and cover the rocks with hot ashes."

"Is that so? Well, I hope no volcano breaks out while I am here."

At last the boys reached a small rise of ground and at a distance saw the column of smoke, plainly. Dave put on extra speed and soon saw Phil, Giles Borden, and several sailors—the survivors from the ill-fated *Emma Brower*.

"Phil!"

"Dave! At last!" cried the shipowner's son, joyfully. "Are you hurt?"

"Not a bit of it. How are you?"

"All right, although I had several tumbles while hunting for you. You disappeared in the strangest fashion."

"I fell into a cave,—went down with Link Merwell."

"Oh!" Phil gave a start. "Who is that in the bushes? Merwell, as sure as I'm alive!"

"Yes, Phil. And what do you think? I've got part of the jewels—Link had them in his money-belt."

"Good enough! I was so afraid they had been lost out of that jewel-case. Did you make Merwell a prisoner?"

"Well, in a way. He might have run away a dozen times, but I guess he didn't want to be alone. Besides, he has quarreled with Jasniff. I'll tell you all about it later," went on Dave, in a lower tone.

Merwell had halted and now he came shuffling into the temporary camp. He nodded sheepishly to the shipowner's son and to the sailors.

"Got ye, did they?" said one of the tars, with a sneer.

"Yes," answered the culprit, meekly.

"Humph! You're a fine Dick to run away and steal jewels!" muttered the sailor, and turned his back on the youth.

"Where are Roger and Captain Sanders and the others?" questioned Dave.

"Gone after you, and after Jasniff and those three rascally Englishmen," answered Phil. "I said I'd stay here and try that trick with a column of smoke. I thought you might remember and look for it."

"It was a good thing to do, Phil," answered our hero, "for it brought us straight to this spot."

CHAPTER XXVII

BEHIND THE CURTAIN OF VINES

An hour went by and during that time Dave drew Phil to one side and related the particulars concerning the doings of Merwell and Jasniff, according to the story told by the former of the two evil-disposed youths.

"I think Link feels pretty sore," he continued. "So there won't be any use in rubbing it in."

"What do you intend to do with him, Dave?"

"I don't know yet. We'll talk it over later on. The thing to do now is to locate Jasniff and get the rest of the jewels. Don't forget that he has the finest of the diamonds. That is one thing that made Link sore—Jasniff taking the lion's share."

"Well, that was the way Jasniff always did, even at school. Now you've got back I'm willing to start the search for him any time you say," continued the shipowner's son.

"We'll wait a while and see if Roger and Captain Sanders return," answered our hero.

He was glad to rest, and threw himself on a bed of moss the sailors had collected. Merwell sat against a tree, tired out, but too much worried

to sleep. Evidently he was trying to decide on what to do next and wondering how he was to get out of the awful situation in which he found himself.

Presently a shout was heard, and Roger burst into view, followed an instant later by Billy Dill.

"Hello, Dave!" cried the senator's son. "Got back, have you?" And then he stared at Merwell. "Oh, are you here, too?"

"Yes," returned the big youth, and that was all he could say.

"Dave, did you get the jewels Merwell had?" went on Roger.

"Yes. But, Roger, how did you know——"

"There is no time to talk it over now, Dave," interrupted the senator's son, quickly. "We have got to act, and that at once! That is, if you want to get back the rest of the jewels."

"Why, what do you mean?" demanded Dave and Phil in a breath, and even Merwell was all attention.

"Do you remember those Englishmen, the fellows who robbed Mr. Borden? Well, we traced them to their camp, and what do you think? They met Jasniff in some way, and he is friendly with them."

"Did he tell them about the jewels?" demanded our hero.

"No, he was cute enough to keep the story of

the jewels to himself,—that is, we didn't hear him tell them anything about the gems. But he said he wanted to get away from the island as quickly as possible, and without being seen by any of us, and he offered the Englishmen a thousand dollars in diamonds if they'd help him. They agreed to it, and all hands are waiting for some ship to come here and take them off."

"The ship I saw last night!" cried Dave, and told of the light on the ocean.

"It must be that ship!" exclaimed Phil.

"They'll get away sure, unless you can stop 'em," put in Merwell, and he seemed to be almost as interested as anybody. It galled him exceedingly to think that his companion in crime might escape.

"Roger, how did you learn this?" asked Dave.

"In a queer kind of a way. Billy Dill got on the trail of the three Englishmen first and we followed them to one of the caves. Then one of the Englishmen went away and after a while he came back with Jasniff, and all hands went to another cave, close to the shore. We got into one part of the cave and overheard what the crowd said, through a crack in the rocks. We might have confronted Jasniff and demanded the jewels, but we saw that the Englishmen were all armed and they looked to be in an ugly mood, and Captain

Sanders wanted no bloodshed if it could be avoided. So then Billy Dill and I said we would come back here and get Phil and the sailors."

"I should think you'd do your best to capture Jasniff," said Merwell.

"Do you want him captured?" asked Roger, sharply.

"Why not? He didn't treat me fairly—and he planned the robbery in the first place."

"Well, if you want him taken you had better help us," put in Phil.

"Say, Dave, if I help you catch Jasniff and get the rest of the jewels back, will you—er—will you let me go?" faltered Link Merwell, anxiously.

"I don't know—I'll see about it, Link," answered Dave, and that was as far as he would commit himself, for he remembered that this case was for Mr. Wadsworth and the authorities to settle.

"I'll help you all I can—just to get square with Nick!" muttered the big youth. "I'll show him that he isn't the only frog in the puddle."

"The sooner we go the better," went on the senator's son.

"I am ready now," returned Dave. "I'll not rest easy until Jasniff is caught and the rest of those jewels are recovered."

A few words more were exchanged, and then it was decided that the whole party should follow

Roger and Billy Dill to the spot from whence they had come.

"Borden is very anxious to have the three Englishmen held," said the senator's son.

"I suppose he wants to get back his money," returned Dave. "I don't blame him."

The path was through the forest and then along a rocky ridge. Here walking was very uncertain, and Roger warned the others to be careful.

"An' if ye ain't careful ye'll go into a hole to Kingdom Come!" put in Billy Dill.

When the ridge was left behind they came to another patch of timber, and then walked through a small cave with a large opening at either end. In the center of this cave was a hole, at the bottom of which flowed an underground river.

"If ever an island was rightly named, this is the one," observed Phil. "It is caves from one end to the other."

"Listen! I thought I heard voices!" exclaimed Dave, suddenly, and held up his hand for silence.

All listened closely and heard a faint murmur, coming from a distance.

"Sounds to me as if it was underground," whispered Phil.

"Yes, but from what direction?" asked Roger.

"I think it comes from over yonder," answered Dave. "Let us go there and make sure."

They walked on, soon coming to a spot where a place between the rocks was covered with a matting of long vines, much intertwined.

"Keep quiet!" suddenly exclaimed our hero. "I know where they are—behind those vines. There must be a cave there, and the vines make a curtain for the entrance."

"Who is it?" asked Merwell.

"I don't know yet. Wait, all of you remain here, behind the rocks, while I investigate."

As silently as possible, Dave crawled forward, keeping close to the rocks on one side of the cave's entrance. Soon he was up to the curtain of vines, and cautiously he thrust his hand forward, making a small opening.

At first our hero could see little, but as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he made out two forms lying on couches of vines, smoking. The forms were those of the two Englishmen, Pardell and Rumney.

"Well, Geswick ought to be coming back," Dave heard Rumney say. "He said he wouldn't waste any time."

"Maybe he had some trouble with that young fellow," returned Pardell. "Say, do you know he's a queer stick? Where did he get those diamonds he offered for his passage?"

"I don't know, but I rather think he stole them."

"Then perhaps he has more of the jewels."

"Just what I was thinking—and Geswick thought the same."

"If he has many of them——" The man paused suggestively.

"We might relieve him, eh?" returned the other.

"Why not? We cleaned out Borden. Two jobs of that sort are no worse than one."

There was a period of silence, and Dave moved back as quietly as possible to where he had left his companions.

"Rumney and Pardell are there, in a long cave," he whispered. "They are waiting for Geswick and, I think, Jasniff."

"But where are Captain Sanders and Smiley?" asked the shipowner's son.

"I don't know. Perhaps they are watching Jasniff and Geswick—or maybe they have captured those rascals."

"Oh, let me get at Pardell and Rumney!" cried Giles Borden. "I'll teach them to rob me!" And he started forward, flourishing a heavy stick he had picked up.

"Wait! wait!" returned Dave, and caught him by the arm. "Don't go yet. Let us lie low until Geswick comes, and maybe Jasniff. We may be able to capture all of them."

"Can we handle so many?" asked Roger.

"I think so. Anyway we can try. Remember, Captain Sanders and Smiley may be following Geswick and Jasniff, and if they are, they'll come to our aid."

"I'll wait, but it's a hard thing to do, don't you know," grumbled the Englishman who had been robbed.

"We had better set a guard, so that we are not surprised," advised Phil. "Supposing we scatter around the rocks and in the vines?"

This was agreed upon, and it was also agreed that Dave should give a whistle when he wanted an attack made.

After this came a long period of waiting. All remained silent, until, of a sudden, everybody was startled by a distant cannon shot.

"What in the world can that mean?" cried Phil, who lay close to our hero.

"It's a shot from a ship's cannon, and it came from the direction of the shore!" returned Dave. "It may be some sort of a signal."

"Do you suppose it's a summons to Pardell and Rumney?"

"It may be. Wait, I'll look into the cave again and see what they are doing."

Losing no time, our hero crawled forward once more to the position he had before occupied. Then he pushed the vines aside and looked into the long cave.

He could not suppress a cry of consternation. The two Englishmen had vanished!

"They are gone!" he called to his companions.

"Gone!" repeated Phil and Roger.

"Don't tell me that!" fairly shrieked Giles Borden. "I must catch them and get back my money!"

"Where did they go to?" asked Billy Dill, as he pushed through the curtain of vines.

"They must have left the cave by some other opening," answered Dave. "Come on, we'll soon find out!" And into the cave he rushed, his chums and the others in the crowd following.

"I see another opening!" cried Merwell, a minute later. "Look!" And he pointed down a passageway to the right.

"That's the way they must have gone!" exclaimed Giles Borden. "After them, all of you! If I get back my money, I'll reward you well!" And on he sped, with Merwell close at his heels and the others following.

"I don't know if we are on the right track or not," said Dave, to Phil and Roger. "This cave may have other openings."

Hardly had he spoken when there came a yell from Giles Borden, followed by a cry from Link Merwell. Both had fallen into a small hole that was filled with water. Each was much shaken up, but unhurt.

"It's a broken neck somebody will get if we are not careful," said one of the sailors. "I'd rather be on the deck of a ship any day than on an island like this."

Soon they were out in the open once more. They were on a rise of ground, and not a great distance away they could see the shore and the rolling ocean.

"A ship!" cried Roger.

"But not the *Golden Eagle!*" returned Dave. "It must be the vessel that was to stop for the Englishmen."

"It is! It is!" bawled Giles Borden. "And look, there they are on the shore, ready to embark, all of them!"

"Yes, and Jasniff is with them!" added Dave, Phil, and Roger in a breath.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH THE ENEMY SAILS AWAY

It was a startling discovery, and for the moment Dave and the others did not know what to do.

"Do you see anything of Captain Sanders, or Smiley?" questioned our hero.

"Not a thing," returned the senator's son. "It's strange, too."

"Oh, cannot we stop them in some manner?" pleaded Giles Borden.

"Come on—we'll do what we can!" cried Phil.

"That's the talk!" put in old Billy Dill. "Oh, for a gatling gun that we might train on 'em!" he added.

All were calculating the distance to the shore. Between them and the water was a slight hollow, overgrown with brushwood and vines. How long would it take to find a path through that hollow?

"No use in staying here," was Dave's comment. "We'll get there somehow. But keep out of sight, if you can. We don't want them to discover us until the last minute."

All moved forward toward the hollow. By walking well over to the left they managed to keep a distant row of palms between themselves and those who were at the water's edge.

But progress was slow, as all soon discovered. The hollow was a treacherous one, full of soft spots and pitfalls. Less than a hundred feet had been covered when two of the sailors went down up to their waists, and a second later Roger followed.

"Hold on, Roger! I'll help you!" cried Dave, and he and Phil ran to their chum's assistance. They did not dare to go near the soft spot and so all they could do was to throw the senator's son a stout vine for use as a rope, and then haul him out by sheer strength. In the meantime the others went to the rescue of the two sailors, and they were hauled out in similar fashion.

"This island certainly is the limit!" gasped Roger, when he was on firm ground once more. "I wouldn't live here if they made me a present of the whole thing!"

"That's right," returned Phil. "Because, if you lived here, you might some day find yourself buried before your time!" And this quaint way of expressing it made all of the boys grin in spite of their excitement.

Beyond the hollow another difficulty confronted them. Here were some sharp rocks, with

deep cuts between. They had to climb over the rocks with extreme care and do not a little jumping, all of which consumed much valuable time.

"They'll be off before we can reach them!" groaned Dave. "Oh, do hurry, fellows!"

"I'm coming as fast as I can!" answered Phil.

"So am I," added Roger.

"You ought to shoot at them, if they won't stop," put in Merwell.

"I'll do what I can," answered our hero. He was wondering how far the present situation would justify the use of firearms.

At last the rocks were left behind, and the crowd found themselves in the fringe of palm trees lining the sandy shore.

"Do you see them?" queried Phil, who was getting winded from his exertions.

"No, I don't," returned Dave. He had looked up and down the sandy strip in vain for a sight of the Englishmen and Jasniff.

Beyond the beach was the reef with the ever-present breakers and far beyond this the ship they had before sighted. The schooner lay-to with all sails lowered.

"There they are!" suddenly shouted Billy Dill. "Too late, boys, too late!"

"Where? where?" came in a shout from the lads and from Giles Borden.

"Look out there, by the reef. Don't you see the small boat in the breakers?" went on the old sailor, pointing with his bronzed hand.

All gazed in the direction he indicated, and Dave and Giles Borden could not repress a groan of dismay. For, riding the swells of the ocean, could be seen a small boat, manned by two sailors. In the boat sat four passengers.

"That's Jasniff, I am sure of it!" cried Phil.

"And those three men are the fellows who robbed me!" muttered Giles Borden. "Oh, what luck! Ten minutes too late!"

"Can't we follow them in some way?" asked Roger.

"I don't see how," answered Dave. "Our rowboat is on the other side of the island. Besides, even if we had a boat, I don't believe we could catch them before the schooner got underway. Oh, isn't it a shame!" And Dave fairly ground his teeth in helpless dismay.

"If we had a cannon!" murmured old Billy Dill. "A shot across the bow o' that craft would make the cap'n take warnin', I'm thinkin'!"

"Do you suppose any other boat is handy?" asked the Englishman.

"We might look," returned the senator's son.

All were about to run out on the beach when Dave suddenly called a halt.

"Don't do it," he said. "If we can't follow

them, it will be best for the present not to show ourselves."

"How's that?" demanded Giles Borden. "It's a bloody shame to let them go in this fashion."

"If they see us, they'll know we are after them and they'll sail away as fast as possible," went on our hero. "If they don't see us, they may take their time in getting away, and that will give us so much better chance to catch them."

"Dave is right!" cried the senator's son. And the others agreed with him, and all kept concealed behind the row of palms and the brushwood and rocks. From that point they watched the small boat gradually approach the schooner until it was alongside. Then a rope ladder was lowered and the passengers mounted to the deck, after which the rowboat was drawn up on the davits.

"What ship is that?" asked Phil.

"She is named the *Aurora,*" answered Giles Borden.

"The *Aurora!*" exclaimed Billy Dill. "Do ye mean the *Aurora,* Cap'n Jack Hunker?"

"Yes, that's the captain's name."

"Why, I know him!" went on the old tar. "Sailed with him once, in the *Peter Cass,*—afore he took command o' the *Aurora.* Say, Dave, he used to be a putty good man. I can't see how he

would stand in with sech fellers as Jasniff an' them thievin' Britishers."

"Perhaps he doesn't know what scoundrels they are," returned our hero.

"Oh, they haven't told him the truth, depend upon that," said Giles Borden. "They have fixed up some story to pull the wool over his eyes. Most likely they'll tell him that I am the rascal of the party and that is why I am to be left behind."

"If the captain of the *Aurora* is all right, it may pay to signal to him," mused Dave. "I wish I had known of this before."

"See! see! they are hoisting the sails!" cried Phil.

"If you are going to signal to the schooner, you had better do it pretty quick," advised Roger.

"I think I will. It can't hurt much—they are going to sail away, anyhow. Come on."

All ran out on the sandy beach, and Dave discharged his shotgun twice as a signal. The others waved tree-branches and brushwood, and Phil even lit some of the latter, to make a smudge.

But if the signals were seen, no attention was paid to them. Those on the schooner continued to hoist the sails, and presently the *Aurora* turned away, leaving Cave Island behind.

As the schooner moved off Dave's heart sank

within him. On board of the craft was Jasniff, and the rascal had the larger portion of the Car- with jewels in his possession.

"It's a shame!" burst out Phil. "Oh, why didn't we get hold of Jasniff when you collared Link!"

"Where is your own ship?" asked Merwell. "Why don't you find her and follow that crowd?" He felt as sour as ever over the thought that he had been captured while his companion in crime had escaped.

"I wish the *Golden Eagle* would come in," answered Dave. "I can't understand what is keeping her, unless she suffered from that storm and had to lay to for repairs."

"And where do you suppose Captain Sanders and Smiley are?" put in Roger.

"I don't know. They may have fallen into one of the caves, or they may have been made prisoners by those who have sailed away."

"Prisoners? I never thought of that!" ex- claimed Giles Borden. "Yes, it would be just like Geswick and those other scoundrels to treat them in that fashion."

"Well, it won't do us any good to remain here," went on our hero. "We may as well scat- ter and see if we can't locate the captain and the others."

This was considered good advice and tired

as the crowd was, all went on the hunt, some up the shore and some down, and the others inland.

Dave and Roger walked down the shore, why neither could exactly tell. They passed the palms and brushwood, and leaving the sand, commenced to climb over some rocks. Then Dave began to shout.

At first no reply came to his calls, but presently he heard a groan, coming from behind the rocks.

"Let us see what it means!" he exclaimed to the senator's son, and they hurried in the direction of the sound with all speed.

Back of the rocks was a grove of plantains, and in the center was the remains of a thatched hut, evidently built by natives years before. On the ground in front of this hut lay Captain Sanders and the sailor, Smiley. Each had his head bound up and each was nursing a bruised ankle.

"Captain Sanders!" cried Dave, in astonishment.

"Dave Porter!" returned the commander of the *Golden Eagle,* joyfully. "My, but I am glad you have come!"

"You are hurt?"

"Yes. Those scoundrels attacked us from behind and knocked us senseless."

"You mean those three Englishmen?"

"Yes, and that fellow Jasniff was with them."

"But your ankles are hurt, too?" went on Dave.

"We hurt them when we fell into one of the beastly caves, or holes. We were following Jasniff and the Englishmen, and also looking for you and the others. Then those rascals got behind us in some way, and the first thing I knew I got a whack behind the ear that knocked me unconscious."

"And I got the same," said Smiley. "Oh, I wish I had my hands on those villains!"

"They have sailed away," said Roger.

"Away!" cried the captain. "How?"

In a few brief words our hero and his chum told of the advance to the beach and of what they and the others had witnessed. Captain Sanders shook his head, soberly.

"That's too bad," he said. "They've got a good start and it will be hard to follow them."

"How can we follow them, when the *Golden Eagle* isn't here?" said Dave.

"But she is here—on the other side of the island."

"Oh, are you sure?" cried our hero.

"Yes. I saw her coming in,—when we were on one of the hills. She was minus her foretopmast,

which shows she must have suffered some in that hurricane."

"If that's the case, let us get to her with all possible speed, go aboard, and follow the *Aurora*," returned Dave.

CHAPTER XXIX

A CHASE ON THE OCEAN

It took the best part of the afternoon and evening to get the whole party together again, and send word to the mate of the *Golden Eagle* to bring the vessel around to that side of Cave Island. And while this was being done the hurts Captain Sanders and Smiley had received were cared for as well as the means at hand permitted.

The captain and the wounded sailor had a long story to tell, of how they had followed the three rascally Englishmen and Nick Jasniff, and how the latter had made a compact with the others, so that they would take him with them when they left the island.

"The Englishmen were a bit afraid of the captain of the *Aurora*," said Captain Sanders, "and we overheard them discuss the situation. They knew the captain would want to know what had become of the fourth man he had left here. At last they resolved to try a trick, but they weren't sure it would work. But evidently it did, for the schooner has sailed."

"What was that trick?" asked Dave.

"It seems that when Mr. Borden was on the *Aurora* he had a headache from the sun and wore smoked glasses. Is that right, sir?"

"It is," answered Giles Borden. "The glare on the waves was beastly, and I wore the smoked glasses all day long."

"Well, the rascals planned to have Jasniff impersonate Mr. Borden. One of them, Geswick, exchanged coats and caps with him, and lent him a pair of smoked glasses, and he was to tie up his cheeks and pretend to be suffering from toothache, and keep to his stateroom as much as possible during the trip."

"Oh, what a thing to do—impersonate me!" roared Giles Borden, in a rage. "Just wait till I confront him!"

"Yes, you'll have to wait," put in Phil, dryly.

"Did you find out where they were going to sail to?" asked Dave, eagerly.

"To San Juan, on the island of Porto Rico. But they may make some stops on the way."

"San Juan," mused Roger. "That's a good many miles from here. Perhaps the *Golden Eagle* can catch the *Aurora* before she gets there."

"If they went to San Juan direct I'd advise waiting till they got in that harbor before I'd do anything," said Captain Sanders.

"Why?" asked the boys.

"Because it is one thing to stop them on the

high seas and another to stop them in United States waters. Remember, Porto Rico is now a part of Uncle Sam's domain."

"Yes, I'd rather go at them there than on the high seas," answered Dave. "But they mustn't get away again, no matter where we have to tackle them," he added, determinedly.

It was impossible to transfer those ashore to the *Golden Eagle* during the darkness, because of the danger in the breakers, so they had to wait until daylight before departing.

Among those to go were, of course, the sailors who had come ashore from the wreck of the *Emma Brower*. Captain Sanders told them they could remain on the island if they wished, but they set up an immediate protest.

"It's not a fit place for any man," said one of the tars. "There is very little game and not much fruit, and one is continually in danger of falling into a hole or a cave. I'll go to Porto Rico gladly, and so will my mates, and we'll work our passage, if you're willing."

"All right," said Captain Sanders. "But you'll not have much to do, as we have about all the hands we need."

When aboard the ship, the captain and the boys listened to the story the mate had to tell. Then they learned that the storm had blown the *Golden Eagle* many miles from Cave Island, and

in trying to avoid some of the keys of another island, the vessel had lost the top of one of the masts and the rudder had been damaged. This had necessitated much delay, which accounted for the non-appearance of the vessel when expected.

While making repairs, the vessel had been passed by a tramp steamer bound for Trinidad. The captain of the steamer had asked if he could be of assistance, and after being told no, had given the information that he had picked up three row-boat loads of passengers and crew from the ill-fated *Emma Brower*. It may be mentioned here that another boat load from the same vessel managed to reach another island in that vicinity, and in the end it was learned that the going down of the bark was unattended with the loss of a single life.

With so many on board, the accommodations on the *Golden Eagle* were somewhat crowded. The sailors went with Billy Dill into the forecastle, while Giles Borden was asked to share Captain Sanders' stateroom. What to do with Link Merwell became a question. In one sense he was a prisoner, yet Dave hated to treat him as such.

"There is the extra pantry," said Captain Sanders. "We can clean that out and put in a cot, and he can use that," and so it was arranged, much to the relief of all of the boys. The pantry had a grating, opening on the main passage-

way, so it made a fairly comfortable stateroom, although rather hot.

"Well, I suppose I've got to take my medicine, when we get back," grumbled Link Merwell, when given his quarters.

"What else could you expect?" returned Dave. "If this was my affair alone, Link, I might let you go, now you have given up the jewels. But what is to be done is for Mr. Wadsworth and the authorities to say."

Merwell had confessed that he and Jasniff had taken the skates and other things at Squirrel Island, and told where they had been left, in a barn along the river, and how they might be recovered. He had also admitted impersonating Dave on several occasions and ordering goods in our hero's name, and doing other mean things of which he had been suspected, and said he was heartily sorry for his actions.

Soon the *Golden Eagle* was ready for the departure from Cave Island. As the sails were hoisted the boys gathered on deck to take a last look at the remarkable spot.

"It is really and truly Cave Island," declared Dave. "I don't believe any other place in the world is so full of caves and holes!"

"I am glad the volcanoes didn't get busy while we were there," remarked the shipowner's son.

"So am I," added Roger. "The caves and

holes were bad enough, without adding other perils."

"Dave, do you think we'll catch that schooner?" went on Phil, after a pause, during which the boys watched the ship drawing away from the island.

"I sincerely hope so," was the serious reply. "If we don't, and Jasniff gets away, this mission down here will have proved almost a failure."

"Then you think Jasniff has the most of the jewels?"

"Yes. If you'll remember, the jewels that were taken were valued at about seventy-five thousand dollars. Well, I have looked at the jewels I got from Link, and so has Mr. Borden, who knows something about gems, and we have come to the conclusion that those Link turned over to me are not worth over fifteen thousand dollars. That means that Jasniff has about sixty thousand dollars' worth."

"Isn't that like Jasniff!" cried the senator's son. "Always wanted the big end of everything! It's a wonder he and Link didn't quarrel before."

"They did quarrel, and Link wanted to leave him several times, but didn't dare, for Jasniff threatened to expose him. In one way, I am sorry for Link,—but, of course, he had no right to commit such a deed."

After Cave Island was left in the distance, Cap-

tain Sanders had a long conference with Giles Borden concerning the Englishmen who had robbed him. Later a general talk took place between the pair and the boys.

"I am afraid we'll have to trust to luck to catch the *Aurora* or locate her," said the captain, finally. "She may go to San Juan and she may go elsewhere."

"If we pass any other vessels, can't we ask if they saw the schooner?" ventured Dave.

"Certainly."

The day went by and also the next. Link Merwell kept to himself, only speaking when addressed. He felt his position keenly, and would no doubt have given a great deal if he could have cleared himself. He was learning that the way of the transgressor is hard.

On the third day, early in the morning, they passed a big barkentine bound for South American ports. Greetings were exchanged, and Captain Sanders asked concerning the *Aurora*.

"Yes, we met her," was the reply. "Yesterday, about two bells in the afternoon watch."

"Did she say where she was bound?"

"Bound for San Juan, Porto Rico."

"Direct?"

"Yes. She was going to stop elsewhere, but the captain allowed he'd make straight for San Juan," added the captain of the barkentine,

through the megaphone he was using. Then, after a few words more, the two vessels separated.

"It's San Juan sure!" cried Dave. "From what Mr. Borden and Billy Dill say of Captain Hunker he would not tell a falsehood. I guess the best thing we can do is to sail for that port."

"I think so myself," returned Captain Sanders.

The chase was now a definite one, and Dave felt much relieved. He wondered if they would be able to overtake the *Aurora* before Porto Rico was reached.

"We can do that with ease," answered Captain Sanders when questioned. "But even so, she may not stick to just the course we take, and we may pass her in the night. So don't worry if we don't see or hear anything before San Juan is reached."

"I'll try not to worry," answered our hero. Yet he could not help it, for so much depended on the successful outcome of his mission. He knew that those at home must be in deep distress, and he could picture the anxiety of Mr. Wadsworth and his wife and Jessie, and also the anxiety of his own folks.

"Oh, we've got to catch Jasniff and get back those jewels!" he told himself. "We've simply got to do it! I won't give up, if I have to follow him around the world!"

It had been warm, but now the weather changed

and a strong breeze made living far more comfortable. The breeze was favorable to sailing, and the *Golden Eagle* plowed the deep at a good rate of speed. Many of the islands of the Lesser Antilles were passed, and some truly dangerous reefs, and then the course was straight for the harbor of San Juan, on the northeastern coast of Porto Rico.

They had seen nothing so far of the *Aurora,* but on the afternoon of the last day out they were passed by a freight steamer from the south and received word that the schooner was not far away and making for San Juan.

"I guess we had better go right in and get the authorities to take hold," said Captain Sanders. "This is no matter for us to handle, now we are in United States waters once more."

Dave agreed; and as soon as possible they entered the harbor and went ashore. It was an easy matter to notify the harbor police, and inside of two hours half a dozen officers of the law were detailed to make the necessary arrests. Dave and Giles Borden and Captain Sanders went with them, leaving Phil, Roger, and the others aboard the *Golden Eagle.*

The patrol boat of the harbor police had to remain on the watch all night and half the next morning before the *Aurora* was sighted.

"There she is!" cried Dave, at last, and Giles

Borden echoed the words. Then the patrol boat lost no time in steaming alongside of the schooner.

"Hello, what's wanted?" demanded Captain Hunker, as he saw the officers of the law.

"We'll come aboard, captain," said the officer in charge.

"What's the matter?"

"We are after four of your passengers."

At that moment somebody appeared near the rail, to learn what the shouting meant. It was Nick Jasniff. He gazed at the officers of the law and then at Dave. As he recognized our hero his face fell and he looked totally dumfounded.

CHAPTER XXX

HOMEWARD BOUND—CONCLUSION

"JASNIFF, I want to see you!" shouted Dave.

"What do you want of me, Dave Porter?" returned the big youth, as boldly as he could.

"You know well enough."

"Humph! You think you've got me, don't you?" sneered Nick Jasniff, and then he left the rail of the vessel and disappeared down a companionway.

By this time the officers of the law were boarding the *Aurora,* accompanied by Giles Borden and Captain Sanders.

"Where are those bloody rascals who robbed me?" exclaimed the Englishman, excitedly. "Just let me get my hands on them!"

"I don't understand this!" returned the captain of the schooner, in surprise. "You'll have to explain."

"You have three Englishmen aboard here—fellows you took to Cave Island when I was with them."

"Say, you're that fourth man!" gasped Captain Hunker. "But that other chap,—the fellow with

smoked glasses, who had his face tied up——" He did not know how to go on.

"He impersonated me, the villain! But I am after the others, for they robbed me of over a thousand pounds, don't you know!"

"Where are your passengers?" demanded the officer in charge of those from the patrol boat, sternly.

"If they are not on deck they must be below,—they had no chance to leave the ship," answered Captain Hunker. "This gets me!" he went on, weakly. "I thought they acted rather strange, but I supposed they were nothing but a crowd of weak-minded critters hunting for pirates' gold."

At that moment Geswick, Pardell, and Rumney came on deck, having heard the tramping of feet overhead and wondering what it meant. Almost before he could speak, Giles Borden had Geswick by the throat and was shaking him violently.

"Will rob me, and leave me a prisoner in that cave!" he roared. "I'll teach you a lesson! Give me my money, you bloody scoundrel!" And then he banged Andrew Geswick's head against a mast.

"Ho, let up!" yelled the criminal. "Let up, I say!" And he tried to squirm away. But it was useless, and in a minute more one of the officers of the law handcuffed him, and Pardell and Rumney were also secured.

"Now I want my money!" stormed Giles Borden. "Every shilling of it!"

"I haven't any of it," replied Rumney. "Geswick and Pardell have it all." Rumney had had a quarrel with his fellows, just as Merwell had quarreled with Jasniff.

"Just you wait, Rumney; we'll fix you for going back on us," growled Andrew Geswick. But this threat did him little good. In the end he and Pardell had to hand over every penny taken from Giles Borden, and then they were marched off to jail, to await a hearing before the authorities.

In the meantime Dave had run across the deck and followed Jasniff down the companionway. He was afraid that the evil-minded youth might hide the stolen jewels or throw them overboard.

When he got below he looked around, but could see nothing of the other boy. He ran along a passageway, peering into one stateroom after another, and also into the cabin and the pantry. Then he heard something like a cover drop near by and hurried in that direction.

Jasniff was in a corner stateroom on his hands and knees. Beside him was a flat steamer trunk, which was closed. It was the lid of this trunk that Dave had heard drop.

"Jasniff, come out of that!" ordered Dave, sternly. "Come right out and hand over those jewels."

"Say, Dave Porter, you think you are smart, don't you?" sneered the big youth, as he got up on his feet.

"Never mind what I think. I want those jewels, every one of them, and I am going to have them."

"I haven't any jewels."

"I know better."

"All right then, you can search me if you want to—and search my baggage, too," went on Jasniff, and held out his arms as if willing to have the investigation begin on the spot.

"If you haven't the jewels on your person, you have hidden them," went on Dave. "Bring them out, right away."

"Not much, Porter, I am not that kind of a fool." Jasniff lowered his voice to a whisper. "To outsiders I won't acknowledge I have the jewels, but if you'll fix it so I go clear, I'll see to it that old Wadsworth gets the gems back."

"I'll fix nothing, Jasniff, and you'll hand over every jewel, and do it right now!" cried Dave, and now he was so angry that he leaped on the criminal and threw him backward over the trunk.

But if Dave was strong, so was Jasniff, and, as of old, the rascal thought nothing of playing a foul trick. Around and around the stateroom went both boys, with first Dave on top and then his opponent. Then suddenly Jasniff pulled him-

"JASNIFF, COME OUT OF THAT!" ORDERED DAVE STERNLY.
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self away and caught up a water pitcher that was on a stand.

"I'll fix you!" he roared, in the same tone of voice he had employed when he had once attacked Dave in the Oak Hall gymnasium, and he brought the heavy pitcher down straight for Dave's head.

Had the blow landed as intended, our hero would have been knocked senseless and perhaps seriously hurt. But quick as the bully was, Dave was quicker, and leaped to one side. Then he let out with his fist, landing on Jasniff's jaw,—a blow that sent the fellow crashing over into a corner. As Jasniff came up, Dave hit him again, and this time he went down all but knocked out.

"Dave!" called a voice from the doorway at that moment, and Captain Sanders appeared. "Having a tussle, eh? Want any help?"

"May be," panted our hero. "He attacked me with the water-pitcher!" And he pointed to the fragments of chinaware that lay on the floor.

"Do-don't h-hit me again!" spluttered Nick Jasniff.

"Will you hand over the jewels and behave yourself?"

"I—I haven't got the jewels," and now Jasniff arose unsteadily to his feet.

"Perhaps he's hidden them," suggested the captain of the *Golden Eagle*. "It would be like him to do it."

"I'll search him first and then look around the room. Where are those officers?"

"They have their hands full just now with those Englishmen. But I'll call them if you wish it."

"No, just see that he doesn't get away," answered Dave.

A rapid search of Jasniff's clothing told our hero that the rascal did not have the gems on his person. Then Dave looked into the steamer trunk.

"Are they there?" inquired Captain Sanders.

"No."

"You'll never get them from me," growled Jasniff, and gave Dave a look that was full of the keenest hatred. "I'll go to prison for life before I'll give them up, now!"

"Watch him carefully," said Dave to the captain, and got down on his hands and knees in front of the berth in the room.

"Nothing under there!" cried Jasniff, but his voice had a trace of anxiety in it.

Dave felt around, but found nothing unusual. Then he lit a match and continued his search. Soon he saw where a board of the side wall had been pried loose and then shoved back into place. He pulled on the board and it came out, revealing a small compartment between two upright posts. In the compartment was something wrapped in a

bandanna handkerchief. He pulled it out and crawled from under the berth.

"I think I've found it," he said, in a voice he tried in vain to steady. Then he untied the handkerchief and brought to light a money belt, exactly like that taken from Link Merwell. He placed it on the steamer trunk and opened it with care. The sight that met his gaze was a dazzling one. The money-belt contained all that Jasniff had carried of the Carwith jewels.

"My, but that's a sight!" murmured Captain Sanders.

"Going to return them, I suppose," sneered Nick Jasniff. "You're a big fool to do it! I'd keep them, and have a good time on the proceeds."

"I am not built that way," answered Dave, shortly. "I'll put this around my waist, with the other," he added, and lost no time in adjusting the second money-belt. It wasn't particularly comfortable to wear those two belts, yet Dave felt a tremendous satisfaction in so doing.

Jasniff was made to march on deck, and there he was handcuffed like the other prisoners. He no longer pretended to have a toothache, but he did have a jaw-ache, from Dave's blow.

The most surprised man was Captain Hunker, and he readily told his story of how the Englishmen had hired him to take them to Cave Island and then call for them later. When Jasniff had

appeared, with the smoked glasses and the bandage on his face, he had pitied the fellow but had not paid much attention to him. When Dave had fired his gun from the shore, Geswick had explained that other fortune hunters were on the island but that they wanted nothing to do with the crowd, so the master of the *Aurora* had gone off without investigating.

Inside of an hour all of the interested parties had gone ashore, and the three rascally Englishmen and Nick Jasniff were marched off by the officers of the law. Roger and Phil appeared and wanted to know the particulars of the capture.

"And what are you going to do next, Dave?" asked the senator's son.

"Get back to Crumville with the jewels, just as soon as I can get away. But I've got to arrange it with the police first."

"Aren't you going to send word ahead?" asked Phil.

"Of course. I'll send a cablegram to-day."

"Won't they be surprised and glad to get it!" murmured Roger.

"And maybe I'm not glad to be able to take the jewels back with me!" answered Dave, his eyes glistening.

An officer had been sent to take charge of Link Merwell, who had been left on board the *Golden Eagle*. An hour later came word that Merwell

could not be found. He had left the vessel in some mysterious manner, dressing himself in one of Dave's best suits before going. A little later Dave learned that Merwell had left San Juan for the interior of Porto Rico. The officers of the law said they would look for him.

The cablegram to Mr. Wadsworth was sent, and soon a reply came back. Then came nearly a week of waiting for a steamer that would take the boys to New York. In the meantime matters were arranged with the authorities so that they could get away, and take the jewels with them. A detective accompanied them, to make certain that the jewels would be properly delivered, for the whole case was now in the hands of the law. Giles Borden remained in San Juan, to press his charge against his fellow countrymen. Captain Sanders remained in the harbor, to await orders from Phil's father.

"Sorry to part with you boys," said the captain, as he shook hands. "Hope you'll sail with me again some day."

"An' sail with me, too," put in old Billy Dill, who was present, and as much interested as anybody.

"But not on such a mission as this has been," returned Dave.

"Nor to such a place as Cave Island," added Roger.

"For caves and pitfalls that island certainly was the limit," was Phil's comment.

The voyage to New York proved to be uneventful, and all of the lads were glad when it was over. Arriving in the metropolis, they lost no time in getting a train for Crumville, the detective going with them, and Dave carrying the precious jewels.

And then what a home-coming followed! All the Wadsworths and the Porters were at the depot to meet them, and everybody was brimming over with good feeling. Mrs. Wadsworth fairly hugged Dave, and Laura kissed him over and over again, and even Jessie could not resist the temptation to rush into his arms.

"Oh, Dave, to think you really got the jewels!" said Jessie. "Oh, I'm so glad! What a hero you are!" And she gave him a look that touched him to the bottom of the heart.

And then came Mr. Wadsworth, his voice shaking with emotion, and then Dave's father, and Uncle Dunston.

"One lad out of a million!" murmured the manufacturer. "Mr. Porter, you can well be proud of Dave!"

"And I am proud of him," replied the parent, heartily.

"We are all proud," added Dunston Porter.

In the excitement it must not be supposed that

Phil and Roger were forgotten. While Dave related his story to the men, and delivered the jewels to Mr. Wadsworth, his chums had to tell about all that had occurred, to Mrs. Wadsworth and the girls. And the questions that were asked and answered would fill a chapter and more.

"And what will they do to Jasniff?" asked Laura.

"Undoubtedly put him in prison for a number of years," answered the senator's son. "And he deserves it."

"What a misspent life!" sighed Mrs. Wadsworth.

"And what about Link Merwell?" asked Jessie.

"I don't know what they'll do to him. Perhaps they won't catch him," said Phil.

"If they don't, I hope he turns over a new leaf and makes a real man of himself," said Laura.

Dave had gone to the jewelry works with the men, and soon Phil and Roger followed. Here the jewels were examined with care, being checked off on a list,—the duplicate of a receipt Oliver Wadsworth had given to the owner of the gems.

"Four stones are missing," announced the manufacturer. "And they are worth less than a thousand dollars. Dave, you certainly did well."

"We can get back at least two of those stones,"

answered Dave. "The pawnbrokers will have to give them up."

"Then the loss will be less than five hundred dollars—a mere trifle alongside of what it might have been. Dave, I'll not offer you a reward, for I know you won't take it. But I thank you, my boy, I thank you most heartily!" And Mr. Wadsworth caught Dave by both hands, while tears of emotion stood in his eyes.

"It saved us all from a tight place, if not ruin," added Dunston Porter.

"How is that old watchman?" asked our hero, to change the subject.

"You mean the man who was hurt?" asked his father. "He is about as well as ever."

"And have you heard from Hooker Montgomery?"

"Not a word, and we sha'n't need to, now."

"Any word from Oak Hall?" asked Roger.

"Yes, the place opened again last week."

"Then I suppose we'll have to get back once more," said Phil. "Well, we've had a long enough vacation,—if you can call it such," he added, with a grin.

"And such adventures!" murmured Roger. "We'll never see such strenuous times again, eh, Dave?"

"There is no telling, we may," answered Dave. There were still many adventures ahead, and what

they were will be related in the next volume of this series, to be entitled, "Dave Porter and the Runaways; or, Last Days at Oak Hall," in which we shall meet our hero and his chums and enemies once more.

"If we are to go back to Oak Hall so soon, let us have all the fun we can," said Dave, after the matter of the jewels had been settled; and the next day he and his chums and the girls went out for a grand sleighride, for it was still winter at home, even though it had been like summer on Cave Island.

"Dave, are you glad to be back?" asked Jessie, while they were gliding over the snow.

"Yes, I am," he answered. "And doubly glad to be here, at your side," he added, in a lower voice.

"Oh, Dave, I was so afraid while you were away!"

"Of what?"

"That those bad boys would harm you! Oh, please be careful in the future, for my sake."

"All right, Jessie, I'll be careful," he answered, and then, under the big robe, he gave her little hand a tight squeeze, and I don't know but that Jessie gave him a squeeze in return. To her Dave was the finest boy in all the world.

"Let's have a song!" cried out Phil, from the seat in front.

"Right you are!" returned Dave. "What shall it be?"

"Oh, anything!" came from the girls in concert; and then they started to sing one familiar song after another; and while they are singing let us say good-by and take our leave.

THE END